

Israeli troops, guerrillas clash in south Lebanon

MARJAYOUN (AP) — Israeli forces and allied militiamen clashed with Lebanese guerrillas on the edge of an Israeli-occupied zone in southern Lebanon Tuesday, killing one guerrilla. Lebanese security officials said. The clash occurred shortly before midday local time near the village of Kfar Houna, about 116 kilometres north of Marjayoun, the main town in the Israeli-occupied sector. The security officials said the guerrillas trying to sneak into the occupied zone encountered Israeli troops and allied militiamen of the south Lebanon army. Guerrillas fired rocket-propelled grenades during the clash, while Israeli artillery gunners combed a nearby valley in pursuit of guerrillas, said the officials, speaking on customary condition of anonymity.

Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published by the Jordan Press Foundation
جوردان تيمز يومية سياسية مستقلة عن المؤسسة الصحفية الأردنية، الرأى.

Turkish Airlines plane hijacked

ANKARA (AFP) — A Turkish Airlines plane with 68 persons on board was hijacked late Tuesday while on a flight from Adana in southern Turkey to Ankara, the Anatolia news agency reported. The aircraft, a British-made RJ 100, landed in Diyarbakir, the main town of Anatolia in the southeast of the country where there is a Kurdish majority. The plane was seized by one man, who said he wanted to be taken to Iran keeping seven hostages and the two pilots and asked for the plane's fuel tanks to be filled. The aircraft was carrying 63 passengers and five crew, the news agency said. The 24-hour news channel NTV said the air pirate was Iranian. It added that strict security measures had been taken around the aircraft at Diyarbakir.

Volume 23 Number 6773

AMMAN WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 25, 1998, SHAWWAL 28, 1418

Price: Jordan 200 fils

In wide-ranging television interview:

Iraq-U.S. dialogue would be welcome — King

AMMAN (J.T.) — His Majesty King Hussein on Tuesday urged an end to the suffering of the Iraqi people and said dialogue between Baghdad and Washington would be a welcome development towards achieving that goal.

"There are problems [between Iraq and the U.S.] that require solution through dialogue," the King said in a wide-ranging interview with Orbit TV and Radio Satellite Network.

Asked whether he thought the U.S. was ready for such a dialogue, the King said: "The Iraqis want to have direct contact [with the U.S.] since 1990 but the doors were not opened."

Following is the full text of the interview:

QUESTION: How do you evaluate the U.N.-Iraqi agreement?

ANSWER: The U.N. secretary general called me after the press conference in Baghdad and he thanked me for the efforts I have made to resolve the crisis and to bring closer the views of the different parties. I asked him if he was satisfied with the results, and he assured me that he was extremely satisfied. It was clear that the U.N. secretary general had refused to go to Baghdad until he obtains a mandate by the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council to move within certain parameters. I believe he worked within that framework and achieved success. Therefore I have great hope that we have now over-

come this crisis.

Q. What do you say about the U.S. demand that it should check on the implementation of the agreement?

A. The U.N. secretary general will submit his report and I believe that there are no obstacles that cannot be overcome. Iraq wanted to send a message to the U.S. and this is what happened. The Iraqi position is positive now. We want to move to a new stage so as to avoid future confrontation if the agreement is implemented.

Q. Will there be a dialogue between the U.S. and Iraq?

A. This is necessary and without it the process will be obstructed. If the Americans have certain demands, these should be directly put on the

table because neither the inspection teams nor others can lead to a final end to the crisis.

Q. Do you believe that there is danger in seeing the U.S. as ruler of the world?

A. If we want to remain friends, the others must understand our position and our interests in the Arab World. The dialogue is continuing and the results so far are encouraging.

Q. What do you mean encouraging, are the Americans ready to open a dialogue with Saddam Hussein?

A. I believe that it is important that this happens. Iraq is a regime and there are problems requiring a solution through direct dialogue. The Iraqis want to have direct contact

since 1990 but the doors were not opened.

Q. Is there a chance for such dialogue?

A. What we hear from the Iraqis is that they want to discuss matters in a logical and sensible manner. The Iraqi crisis broke the back of the Arab Nation. Many losses have occurred, a lot of blood has been shed. This affected our position.

Q. Can you describe Iraq's position towards the U.S.?

A. This is important, but I cannot answer this immediately because the Iraqis are not happy with the suffering. We must be realistic. After all the suffering should be taken into consideration.

Q. Kofi Annan gave you the result of the meeting, why did not Saddam do that?

A. I have not talked to Saddam since the start of the Gulf crisis. It is difficult for me to talk to him because it is difficult to locate his place for security reasons.

Q. What do you say about accusations that Jordan supported Saddam's invasion of Kuwait?

A. I only take sides towards my Arab Nation and the Iraqi people. The invasion took us by surprise. The aggressor party should be confronted by the whole Arab Nation. What happened pained us a great deal and was a

(Continued on page 7)

Security Council expresses gratitude for Annan's deal

France: Quick enforcement of accord would enable us to go further and lead to lifting of sanctions

Combined agency dispatches

GABONESE AMBASSADOR Denis Dangué Rewaka, the acting president of the U.N. Security Council, issued a statement on Tuesday expressing the council's gratitude for U.N. chief Kofi Annan's efforts to resolve the U.N.-Iraq crisis, and described the deal struck with Baghdad as "satisfactory."

"The Security Council expressed its gratitude to him for the action he undertook in Baghdad which led to the very satisfactory result, namely the memorandum of agreement," Mr. Rewaka said.

"The Security Council encouraged the secretary-

general to continue working to enable the United Nations to arrive at a prompt and lasting solution to that matter."

The Security Council's statement came amidst criticism of the deal from U.S. congressmen prompting

We have to be watching very closely now, to see not just what Iraq says, but what it does — Clinton

U.S. President Bill Clinton to promise to scrutinize Iraq in the wake of Annan's agreement.

In Baghdad, Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz said Tuesday that Iraq had won major gains in the deal brokered with Mr. Annan to

end the arms inspection crisis.

"We have obtained important gains in this accord. These gains are of a political and practical nature related to the question of the lifting of the embargo" imposed on Iraq

to allow U.N. arms inspectors to search presidential palaces.

The agreement, granting U.N. inspectors full access to the presidential sites while maintaining Iraq's dignity and sovereignty, received a warm welcome from the U.N. Security Council on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, French leaders on Tuesday held out the prospect of an early end to sanctions against Iraq following a quick and full implementation of the arms inspection accord.

Quick and effective enforcement of the accord to dismantle Iraqi weapons of mass destruction "would enable us to go further and

(Continued on page 7)

Arafat says after Iraq, U.S. should do the same with Israel

Combined agency dispatches

PALESTINIAN PRESIDENT Yasser Arafat said Tuesday that after the success of international pressure on Iraq, now "the United States should do the same with the Israelis."

"What just happened in Iraq confirms that the whole world supports the close and immediate implementation of U.N. resolutions," said Mr. Arafat after a conference here on Palestinians' rights organised by the United Nations, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference and the Arab League.

But, he said, Israel had not respected "any" U.N. resolutions concerning Palestine to date.

"Nobody is allowed to break these resolutions," he said. "Israel must implement them to the last detail."

Meanwhile, the Arab League on Tuesday urged the United States to learn from the Iraq crisis and re-examine its policies

(Continued on page 3)

King receives Iranian deputy foreign minister

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — His Majesty King Hussein on Tuesday met with Iran's deputy foreign minister, Sayid Mohammad Sader, who delivered a message from Iranian President Mohammad Khatami on the Gulf crisis between Iraq and the United States.

The message focused on the efforts made to contain the crisis peacefully, Jordan News Agency, Petra, said.

The King expressed optimism over the agreement reached Monday between Iraq and the United Nations over arms inspections, which calls for the implementation of U.N. resolutions as a step towards lifting the seven-year-old sanctions on that country. Mr. Sader also met with HRH Crown Prince Hassan.

The agreement was signed by Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz and U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan on

Monday.

The agreement ensures free access for U.N. inspection teams to all presidential palaces in Iraq.

Earlier in the day, Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali met with Mr. Sader and discussed with him ways to improve relations between the two countries.

The Iranian official expressed his "country's relief" with the diplomatic

(Continued on page 3)



His Majesty King Hussein receives Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Sayid Mohammad Sader, Tuesday (Photo by Youssef Allan)

Prince Hassan meets European envoys, voices relief for end of Iraqi crisis

By Francesca Ciriaci
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan on Tuesday expressed Jordan's relief at the successful conclusion of U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan's mission to Baghdad and called on the international community to adopt a more comprehensive approach in dealing with Middle Eastern issues.

"There was a sense of relief that the opportunity had not been missed," Prince Hassan said, referring to Mr. Annan's four-day mission to defuse the U.N.-Iraq stand off over weapons inspections and spare the region the disastrous consequences of a fresh military confrontation.

"We hope that the days ahead, after the agreement is read and absorbed, will be

days in which the international community will continue in a more comprehensive manner to look at all regional problems, in a dimension inclusive of the Palestinian-Israeli discussions on the one side, and indeed inclusive of the three baskets of conversation with Europe: cultural cooperation, economic cooperation, and cooperation in the security field," the Crown Prince said.

He was speaking to reporters after a lunch with European ambassadors here, hosted by British Ambassador Christopher Battiscombe.

Britain, which is currently holding the six-month presidency of the European Union (EU), expressed on behalf of the other 14 member states Europe's appreciation for Jordan's untiring efforts in defusing the U.N.-Iraqi crisis. Mr. Battiscombe said.

"We believe that Jordan has played a very positive role," he stated, noting that the Crown Prince was the only Arab leader who saw Mr. Annan before his mission and upon his return from Baghdad.

Mr. Annan briefed Prince Hassan on his last-ditch mission to avert a U.S.-threatened military strike on Iraq in Paris, where the two met early Friday morning.

Mr. Annan also made a stop in Amman during his return trip from Baghdad on Monday.

"Jordan has played an extremely positive role in a very difficult situation, making it clear that [Iraqi President] Saddam Hussein must comply fully with the U.N. resolutions, but at the same time working for a peaceful settlement of the crisis," the British envoy said.

Jordan, PNA reject call for Camp David style talks as 'cheating'

Combined agency dispatches

INFORMATION MINISTER Abdullah Ensour said Tuesday that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's call for Camp David-style talks on a final peace accord with the Palestinians was an invitation to "leap into the unknown."

"Netanyahu's hidden intention is to ignore signed Israeli commitments with the Palestinians," Dr. Ensour told reporters.

Israel's right-wing premier called Monday for direct talks with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat to broker a definitive peace agreement, even though the peace process has been deadlocked for 11 months.

"We should sit down together Mr. Arafat and myself in the presence of the Americans, for example at Camp David in the United States, to solve the problem and reach an historic accord," Mr. Netanyahu said in a reference to the Camp David agreement that led to the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty.

"We need courageous

(Continued on page 7)

Yatom resigns over Misha'al fiasco

TEL AVIV (AFP) — The head of Israel's Mossad secret service, Danny Yatom, resigned on Tuesday following a failed operation against Hamas' leader in Jordan five months ago, the Israeli prime minister's office said.

The head of the Mossad, Danny Yatom, met Tuesday afternoon with the Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu] and informed him of his desire to terminate his position," it said in a statement.

"The prime minister accepted it with regret," it said, although Mr. Yatom was asked to remain until a replacement was found.

Mr. Yatom, 53, has been head of Mossad for two years.

An Israeli commission of inquiry earlier this month held Mr. Yatom responsible for the failed attempt to assassinate Hamas political leader Khaled Misha'al in Amman in September but stopped short of calling for his resignation.

The operation soured ties between Israel and Jordan, which had signed a peace treaty in October 1994.

But Mr. Yatom said that despite his resignation he

rejected the findings of the so-called Ciechanover committee which investigated the Mossad operation.

"I don't accept the committee's findings in regard to my role. The clear evidence that I presented to the members of the committee totally contradicted their report," he said in his resignation letter, according to the statement.

"But I don't intend to evade the report. As someone who takes general responsibility for Mossad activities I decided to submit to you my resignation," Mr. Yatom wrote.

"Despite occasional mistakes, the Mossad has carried out many complicated operations that ended in success and contributed greatly to the security of the state of Israel."

Mr. Yatom's initial refusal to step down had provoked a revolt in the secret service and the resignation of one of his senior officers, the Yediot Aharonot newspaper said on Tuesday.

"The Mossad is facing a revolt of its senior officers against their commander," the paper said, quoting a senior officer as describing the turmoil in the agency as "unprecedented."

Anani: Resignation is step in right direction

By Alia Shukri Hamzeh
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Jordan on Tuesday welcomed as a "step in the right direction," the resignation of the head of Israel's Mossad secret service following its failed attempt on the life of a Hamas leader in Amman last September.

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Jawad Anani said: "Jordan welcomes the resignation if Israel perceives it as a step towards achieving better ties with the Kingdom."

"The resignation falls in line with Jordan's strong stance against being a base for conspiracy aimed at anybody," he said, adding that Jordan seeks better relations with Israel in accordance with the peace treaty signed in 1994.

The Mossad chief, Danny Yatom, on Tuesday resigned from his post after an investigation in the affair found him responsible for the operation

failure.

Khaled Misha'al, meanwhile, described Mr. Yatom's resignation as "meaningless" because it does not signify a change in Israel's hard-line policies towards Arab states.

"Changes in Israeli leadership following its failed attempt on the life of a Hamas leader in Amman last September," Mr. Misha'al told the Jordan Times. Nobody "should be fooled by this resignation."

"It does not mean a change in their terrorist policies, but only in their approach," he said.

Jordan was outraged by the conclusion of the three men Israeli inquiry team which condoned the attempt to assassinate Mr. Misha'al on Jordanian soil.

Minister of Interior Nuhayeh Rasheed reacted at the time the report was released by saying: "This is a negative sign which we will never accept. We will not allow such things to happen on Jordanian soil."

كلماتنا الأصل

Hamas leader tells Arafat to ease up on his men, stand up to Israel

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (R) — The spiritual leader of Hamas urged the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) on Saturday to stop cracking down on the Islamist movement and start standing up to Israel.

In an rare interview with Israeli television, Sheikh Ahmad Yassin decried Palestinian police for rounding up and jailing Hamas members in order to meet Israeli demands that Palestinian President Yasser Arafat take a tougher stance against Islamists.

"The Palestinian Authority is hounding the Hamas movement. I reject this

hounding. I view it as wrong, as unjustified aggression. It is an implementation of the orders and desires of the Americans and Israelis," the wheelchair-bound Sheikh Yassin told Channel Two Television in Arabic.

Sheikh Yassin, whose movement is behind a series of suicide bombings against Israel, also criticised President Arafat's administration for shutting down Hamas offices which he said had managed to stay open under Israeli rule in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

"What about the humanitarian institutions? Why are they closing them? The [Israeli]

occupation was here and it didn't close them. Why are they pressing the Authority to do what they never did?" he asked.

Sheikh Yassin has made similar remarks against the PNA since Israel released him from prison in October but he has stated repeatedly that he would never openly confront the PNA through force, because such a move would be seen as playing into Israel's hands.

U.S. President Bill Clinton held separate talks with President Arafat and Mr. Netanyahu in Washington last week, urging them to trade a gradual Israeli with-

drawal from more of the West Bank for tougher Palestinian security actions, including an assault on Hamas.

The movement is implacably opposed to dealings with Israel and views the PNA's aim to found an independent state limited to the West Bank and Gaza as a betrayal of historic Palestine.

At the beginning of the interview, the Israeli journalists held up photographs for Sheikh Yassin to see of Israelis killed and mutilated in Hamas bombings.

Sheikh Yassin said the pictures pained him but accused Israel of committing similar atrocities against Palestinians.

PLO's highest body may meet to discuss charter — official

GAZA CITY (AFP) — The PLO's highest executive body may meet soon to detail parts of the PLO Charter which have been annulled in a bid to satisfy Israel's demands that the document be purged of references to its destruction, a Palestinian official said Saturday.

"A call may be made for the PLO Executive Committee to convene in order to clarify the 1996 decision by the Palestine National Council on the amendment of the charter," said a statement by Palestinian International Cooperation Minister Nabil Shaath.

The statement did not say when the session of the 18-member Executive Committee, the PLO's highest executive body, could be held.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has demanded the charter be rewritten to eliminate references to Israel's destruction as one of a number of pre-conditions to conducting a promised troop withdrawal in the West Bank.

But his government has rejected "clarifications" on the charter made by Palestinian President Yasser Arafat last week, which would most likely be considered by an executive committee session.

The Palestine National Council (PNC), considered the PLO's "parliament," met

in April 1996 and made a general declaration that all clauses in the 1968 charter which contradicted the peace process were annulled.

That was enough to satisfy then-Israeli prime minister Shimon Peres.

But Mr. Netanyahu has insisted the specific changes be made and in a bid to satisfy his demands, Mr. Arafat specified the articles which had been changed in a letter he gave to U.S. President Bill Clinton in Washington on Thursday.

Mr. Netanyahu's government said the letter was not enough and demanded the 669-member PNC be reconvened to write specific changes.

Mr. Arafat's letter to Mr. Clinton listed 12 out of the charter's 33 articles which had been annulled by the 1996 PNC decision and another 16 which were "partially annulled."

The annulled articles feature the fiery revolutionary rhetoric of the 1960s calling for an "armed struggle" to liberate Palestine and calling Zionism, the founding movement of Israel, a "racist and imperialist" philosophy.

Notably, the letter specifies articles nine, 10 and 21 as eliminated. "Armed struggle is the only way to liberate Palestine. Thus it is the overall strategy and not

merely a tactical phase," article nine reads.

"Command action constitutes the nucleus of the Palestinian popular liberation war. This requires its escalation, comprehensiveness and the mobilisation of all Palestinian... efforts... in the armed Palestinian revolution," article 10 reads.

Article 21 reads: "The Arab Palestinian people, expressing themselves by the armed Palestinian revolution, reject all solutions which are substitutes for the total liberation of Palestine."

It also annuls a clause calling Zionism "racist and fanatic in its nature, aggressive, expansionist and colonial in its aims and fascist in its methods" and insisting the 1947 partition of Palestine and subsequent creation of Israel are "entirely illegal."

Also eliminated are clauses calling on Arab countries to give military and moral support to the "armed Palestinian revolution" and denying that Jews constitute an "independent nationality" of a "single nation."

The letter does not specify the "partial" changes made to the 16 other articles, none of which call directly for armed struggle or the elimination of Israel.

Arafat to meet with Morocco's King Hassan

RABAT (R) — Palestinian President Yasser Arafat arrived in Morocco on Saturday to brief King Hassan on his visit to Washington.

"My visit to Morocco aims to brief His Majesty King Hassan on my latest talks in Washington which unfortunately were not conclusive," President Arafat told reporters at Rabat airport.

Mr. Arafat, who arrived on a Saudi plane, said: "The talks in Washington brought no solution to the deadlocked peace process because of Mr. (Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin) Netanyahu's position."

President Arafat was expected to meet King Hassan at the royal palace in Rabat later on Saturday, a Moroccan official said.

King Hassan is the chairman of Al Quds (Jerusalem) Committee set up by Islamic countries to back Palestinians in the Holy City. President Arafat and Mr. Netanyahu held separate meetings in Washington in the past week with President Bill Clinton who tried but failed to jump-start the stalled Middle East peace process.

Mr. Arafat, at a Washington news conference on Friday, dismissed an Israeli troop withdrawal offer as "peanuts."



PRAYER SERVICE: An Iraqi woman prays Saturday while holding her child, as another woman waits, left, at the Um Al-Toubol Mosque in Baghdad. The prayers, organised by the General Federation of Iraqi Women, called for an end to the threats and embargoes against their country (AP photo)

Arab rights group calls for independent probe into Algerian massacres

CAIRO (AFP) — The Algerian government should allow a "national, independent and impartial investigation" of recent massacres in which hundreds of civilians are reported to have been killed, a pan-Arab human rights organisation urged Saturday.

"It may be possible to justify rejection by the government and many national bodies of the principle of an international investigation, for fear of international intervention or internationalisation of the issue," said a statement from the Arab Organisation of Human Rights (AOHR) based here.

But "it remains necessary to undertake a national, independent and impartial investigation" of these massacres, and to expose the "identities of the perpetrators so as to enable their prosecution, trial and ending the acts of violence."

Algeria has rejected a chorus of calls for an international inquiry into the massacres, in which hundreds of civilians are reported to have been killed in the last few days alone, saying it would be a violation of its sovereignty.

Algeria insists the massacres are the work of "terrorists," its normal term for members of the Armed

Islamic Group (GIA), which has fought the government since the cancellation of parliamentary elections in 1992.

But foreign observers have said some of the massacres have been perpetrated near large military garrisons and have suggested that the government has been at very least negligent in preventing them.

The AOHR said it was "greatly concerned" by allegations of the reluctance on the part of the authorities to intervene for the protection of civilians in a number of massacres, notably those that took place near army and security force bases.

It said it was also worried by allegations "of involvement of self-defence militias in widening the scope of the massacres."

A government-sponsored human rights organisation in Algeria, the National Human Rights Observatory, has accused international human rights organisations, notably Amnesty International, of inciting attacks on the army and police by urging "armed rebel groups" to stop targeting civilians.

More than 2.5 million Muslims throng cities of Mecca, Medina

DUBAI (R) — More than 2.5 million Muslims thronged the Islamic Holy cities of Mecca and Medina to worship at the last Friday prayers in the fasting month of Ramadan, Saudi newspapers said on Saturday.

The papers said the Grand Mosque in Mecca and the Prophet's Mosque in Medina were overflowing with worshippers.

"In anticipation of the heavy rush, authorities had beefed up services around the [holy sites], especially in Mecca, where a large number are still streaming into the city to perform Umra," the Saudi Gazette said.

Umra is a minor pilgrimage. The paper said authorities were prepared to handle an even larger number of wor-

shippers on Saturday for Laylat Al Qadr, the night when Islam's Holy Book, the Koran, was revealed to the Prophet Mohammad.

Last year, Saudi Arabia said up to three million Muslims converged on Mecca in the last 10 days of Ramadan to mark Laylat Al Qadr.

Ramadan ends in the last week of January, when the world's one billion Muslims celebrate the feast of 'Eid Al Fitr.

Saudi Arabia's King Fahd and many senior government officials are already in Mecca and some leaders from other Muslim countries, including Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, are performing Umra this week.

Saudi imam deplores ban on Welfare Party

DUBAI (R) — An imam at the Grand Mosque in Mecca has deplored the ban on Turkey's Islam-based Welfare Party, the Saudi daily Arab News said Saturday.

"They ignored international law when they chose to disregard the interest of their people," Omar Muhammad Al Subayyel was quoted as saying, in reference to the ban on the party by Turkey's constitutional court.

The paper said Imam Subayyel was addressing some 1.5 million worshippers at Friday prayers in the Mosque, which houses the Kaaba shrine. Muslims around the world face the Kaaba, Islam's

holiest shrine, when they pray. Turkey's constitutional court on Jan. 16 banned Welfare on charges of threatening the secularist constitution and threw veteran Islamist leader Necmettin Erbakan out of parliament.

Imam Subayyel also called for an end to recent violence in Algeria, which has claimed more than 1,200 lives since the end of last year.

"He also urged Muslims to unite under the banner of Islam to liberate Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem and counter other challenges facing them," the Arab News said.

At least 23 dead in recent Algerian attacks — papers

ALGIERS (R) — At least 23 civilians, including a father and two sons aged 10 and 15, were killed by gunmen and bombers in Algeria, residents and newspapers said on Saturday.

Five bombs exploded in Algiers, in the garrison town of Blida 50 km to the south, and in Seif city, 220 km east of the capital, on Friday, killing eight people and wounding 16, the daily Liberte said.

Security forces had earlier said three bombs exploded in Algiers and Blida on Friday,

killing one civilian and wounding 10. It said two alleged bombers also died in one of the blasts.

Attackers cut the throats of seven civilians on Friday night in Telagh area in Sidi Bel Abbes province, 370 km west of Algiers, residents in the area said.

The assailants also wounded seven people, they added. The residents, speaking by telephone on Saturday, gave no further details.

Liberte said eight gunmen

wearing government guards uniforms killed three peasants in Beni Messous district in Algiers on Friday night.

The gunmen, two of them armed with Kalashnikov assault rifles, told the villagers before the killing that they were members of the government communal guards carrying out a routine patrol, the paper quoted one survivor as saying.

They also wounded another peasant, it said.

The daily evening Le Soir d'Algerie put the death toll

from that attack at eight. Beni Messous was the site of a massacre on Sept. 5 in which at least 49 civilians were killed.

Liberte said assailants killed a man and his two sons, aged 10 and 15 years overnight Wednesday-Thursday in Haouch Al Messaoud village in Medea region, 70 km south of Algiers.

They also wounded his wife and 12-year-old daughter and abducted their two other daughters, aged 16 and 18, the newspaper added.

Le Soir d'Algerie said about

15 attackers cut the throats of two men, aged 21 and 25 years, on the same night at a hamlet in Sour Al Ghazlane area, also located in Medea province.

The newspaper said the assailants attempted to massacre the village's inhabitants in the raid but the villagers fled.

There was no word on these attacks from the authorities.

More than 1,200 people have been killed in massacres and other attacks in Algeria since the start of the Holy Month of Ramadan on Dec. 30. The

authorities blame Islamist rebels for the killings.

The violence began in 1992 when the guerrillas took up arms following the cancellation of a general election in which Islamists had taken a commanding lead.

Independent Western estimates have put the overall death toll, including thousands of Islamist rebels, at around 65,000 while human rights groups have spoken of 80,000 dead.

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14:00 Holy Koran
14:10 Cartoon
14:30 French Programmes
16:15 Prayers
16:30 Believe and Behave
17:00 Energy Express
17:30 Tarzan
18:30 News Headlines
18:35 America's Funniest Home Videos
19:00 News in French
19:15 Ramadan Talks
20:01 Dadd's Army
20:30 Killing for a Living
21:00 Renegade II
22:00 News in English
22:30 North and South
23:15 The Jewel in the Crown
23:59 Islam in a changing world

PRAYER TIMES

05:09 Fajr
06:29 (Sunrise) Duha
11:48 Dhuhr
14:42 'Asr
17:06 Maghreb
18:27 'Isha

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Assemblies of God Church Tel.

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

632785. St. Joseph Church Tel. 624590 Church of the Annunciation Tel. 637440. De la Salle Church Tel. 661757. Terra Sancta Church Tel. 622366 Anglican Church Tel. 652826. Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 771331. Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 775261. St. Ephraim Church Tel. 771751. Armanan International Church Tel. 865897 Evangelical Lutheran Church Tel. 824328. German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 688404 The Latter-Day Saints Tel. 654932. Church of Nazarene Tel. 675691. The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 811295 English-speaking Latin Catholics Parish Tel. 614190.	continue to be cold, cloudy, and rainy. In Aqaba, skies will be par- tially cloudy with a chance of scat- tered showers, winds northerly moderate, and seas choppy. Min./Max. temp.05/09 Aqaba08/17 Deserts03/11 Jordan09/15 Val- ley	Yesterday's high temperatures: Amman 11, Aqaba 18 Humidity readings: Amman 50 per cent, Aqaba 33 per cent.	AMMAN: Dr. Khalil Al Tushuq757253 Dr. Nasser Ibrahim830432 Dr. Wafiq Qaddumi893542 Dr. Bahjat Bader832642 Firas pharmacy661912 Ferdows pharmacy787336 Al Asema pharmacy637055 Nairoukh pharmacy623672 Al Salam pharmacy636730 Yacoub pharmacy644945 Shmeisani pharmacy637660	Najib pharmacy847632 IRBID: Dr. Ghazi Ta'annab250080 Al Quds pharmacy(-) ZARQA: Dr. Walid Nabhan995743 Khalifeh pharmacy98541	EMERGENCIES Food Control Centre637111 Civil Defence Department661111 Civil Defence Immediate Rescue Centre630341 Civil Defence Emergency199 Rescue Police192.621111.637777 Fire Brigade617101 Blood Bank775121 Highway Police843402 Traffic Police896390 Public Security Dept.630321 Hotel Complaints605800 Price Complaints661176 Water & Sewerage Complaints897467 Amman Municipality Complaints Telephone Information (directory assistance)121 Overseas Calls010230 Central Amman Telephone Repairs623101 Jordan Tel. Repairs661101 Radio Television773111 Radio Jordan774111 Water Authority680100	J. Electricity Authority815615 Electric Power Co.636381 RJ Flight Information (+44-53200) Queen Alia Int. Airport 44-53200	HOSPITALS AMMAN: Hussein Medical Centre81381332 Khalidi Maternity64428116 Akileh Maternity6424112 Jabal Amman Maternity642362 Malhas, J. Amman636140 Palestine, Shmeisani607071 Shmeisani Hospital669131 University Hospital645845 Al-Muasher Hospital667227/9 The Islamic, Abdali66612637 Al-Ahli, Abdali6641646 Italian, Al-Muhajreen777101/3 Al-Bashir775111/26 Army, Marka891611/15 Queen Alia Hospital602240/50 Amal Hospital674155 The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery865199 ZARQA: Zarqa Govt. Hospital09983323 Zarqa National Hospital09900560 Ibn Sina Hospital09986732 Al Hikma Modern Hospital09990990 IRBID: Zarqa Govt. Hospital09983323 Zarqa National Hospital09900560 Ibn Sina Hospital09986732 Al Hikma Modern Hospital09990990	Princess Basma Hospital02727555 Greek Catholic Hospital02727275 Ibn Al Nafees Hospital021247100 AQABA: Princess Haya Hospital (03)314111	FOR THE TRAVELLER QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (44) 53200-5, where it should always be verified. Information on other flights can be supplied on phone (44) (52700)	ARRIVALS Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights 08:05 London (RJ) 08:35 Athens (RJ) 08:45 Paris, Geneva (RJ) 09:15 Brussels, Rome (RJ) 09:50 Frankfurt (RJ) 10:25 Vienna, Aqaba (RJ) 11:30 Cairo (RJ) 17:45 London (RJ) 18:05 Athens (RJ) 18:40 Paris, Geneva (RJ) 19:10 Brussels, Rome (RJ) 21:20 Frankfurt (RJ) 22:15 Vienna, Aqaba (RJ) 22:50 Cairo (RJ)	Other Flights 03:25 Rome (AZ) 10:00 Sanaa (Y) 12:25 Bahrain (GF) 13:00 Moscow (SU) 15:00 Doha (QR) 17:45 Jeddah (SV) 20:00 Tel Aviv (LY) 20:40 Cairo (MS) 23:10 Istanbul (TK)	Royal Wings (RW) 07:45 Aqaba (RW) 09:05 Amman (QAIA) (RW) 09:50 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW) 17:20 Tel Aviv (RW) 18:30 Amman (QAIA) (RW) 21:20 Aqaba (RW) 22:50 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW)	DEPARTURES Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights 06:20 Beirut (RJ) 10:00 Rome, Frankfurt (RJ)	10:50 Aqaba, Vienna (RJ) 11:30 Tunis, Casablanca (RJ) 11:30 Amsterdam, New York (RJ) 12:15 London (RJ) 12:20 Athens (RJ) 20:10 Cairo (RJ) 20:15 New Delhi (RJ) 20:40 Damascus (RJ) 20:50 Jeddah (RJ) 21:00 Abu Dhabi, Dubai (RJ) 22:45 Sanaa (RJ) 23:00 Jakarta (RJ) 23:30 Bangkok (RJ) 23:59 Kuala Lumpur (RJ)	Other Flights 03:00 Athens (OA) 04:20 Rome (AZ) 06:40 Beirut, London (BA) 07:50 London (BA) 11:00 Sanaa (Y) 13:15 Doha (GF) 14:50 Moscow (SU) 16:00 Doha (QR) 19:15 Jeddah (SV) 21:20 Tel Aviv (LY) 21:40 Cairo (MS)	Royal Wings (RW) 06:45 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW) 08:15 Aqaba (RW) 09:30 Amman (QAIA) (RW) 16:45 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW) 17:35 Tel Aviv (RW) 20:30 Amman (QAIA) (RW) 21:50 Aqaba (RW)
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Her Majesty Queen Noor on Saturday meets with UNU Vice Rector Abraham Besrat and UNU/ILA Advisory Committee Vice Chair Hisashi Owada (Photo by George Crystal)

Queen, U.N. University discuss 1998 leadership programme

AMMAN (J.T.) — Her Majesty Queen Noor chaired a meeting with U.N. University/International Leadership Academy (UNU/ILA) officials at Bab Al Salam Palace to discuss the format and selection process of the academy's second International Leadership Programme, to be held next summer, according to a press release Saturday.

Queen Noor, who chairs the UNU/ILA's Advisory Committee, also discussed details of the Advanced Leadership Programme, scheduled to take place in March-April 1999, with UNU/ILA Advisory Committee Vice Chair Hisashi Owada and UNU Vice Rector Abraham Besrat.

The 1997 leadership programme, which was inaugurated by Queen Noor and Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali last June, featured workshops and interactive discussions between 163 participants from 64 countries and 50 distinguished keynote speakers, including His Majesty King Hussein, Egyptian Foreign Minister

Amr Musa and former president of European Parliament Simone Veil, the statement said.

The speakers for the 1998 programme will include current and former leaders, high-level U.N. and government officials, heads of political parties and directors of international organisations. The 1998 programme will comprise interactive seminars and workshops on issues of peace, security and global leadership challenges, as well as training courses on creativity and leadership skills conducted by "The Centre for Creative Leadership" in the United States. The programme will also involve a field study component of travel to different regions of the world, the statement continued.

According to UNU/ILA Director Adel Safty, the Advanced Leadership Programme is a six-week extended programme that will "provide in-depth training in leadership skills and attitudes to a group of participants

Cabinet briefed on King's visit to Saudi Arabia

AMMAN (Petra) — The Council of Ministers on Saturday listened to a briefing by Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali on His Majesty King Hussein's visit to Saudi Arabia, where he performed umra (lesser pilgrimage) in Mecca and held talks with King Fahd and senior Saudi officials.

The King's talks centred on Jordanian-Saudi relations and cooperation in different fields.

The Council approved an allocation of JD110,000 from the Ministry of Finance's 1998 budget to finance the work of a government-sponsored unit conducting studies on security and disarmament.

The Cabinet formed Jordan's delegation to maintain contacts with an international organisation on banning chemical weapons. Jordan had earlier expressed its desire to join the international treaty on banning the manufacture and use of chemical weapons.

The Council of Ministers decided to increase Jordan's contribution to the International Monetary Fund.

At the regular Cabinet session, a delegation was formed to attend the 15th meeting of a team of experts on international accountability rules to be held in Geneva on Feb. 11.

The head of the Audit Bureau is to lead the delegation to the three-day meeting.

The Cabinet created a delegation, led by Minister of Transport and Telecommunications Bassam Saket, to attend an international conference on the application of air navigation rules to be held in Brazil on May 5.

Jordanians remain imprisoned in Iraq — Rashid

By Fairouz Abu-Ghazaleh
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Despite Baghdad's recent release of 92 Jordanian prisoners, there are still nationals in Iraqi prisons, Minister of Interior Nahir Rashid told the Lower House of Parliament during yesterday's session.

Over 50 Jordanian prisoners freed under a general amnesty by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein returned home on Wednesday. Another 18 convicts had been released but decided to remain in Iraq, while 12 men in detention whose charges were also dropped under the unexpected amnesty opted to stay there.

Mr. Rashid said he had met with Iraqi Minister of Interior Muhammad Zaim Abdul Razzaq three times in the last month to discuss the issue of Jordanian prisoners in Iraq.

In their last meeting, Mr. Abdul Razzaq provided him with a list that included names of 69 Jordanians in Iraqi prisons.

Mr. Rashid said those of the names of those who were released did not match the names of those provided in the list. Iraqi embassy diplomats were not immediately available for comment on the discrepancy in the figures.

Mr. Rashid also said one Jordanian man called him to ask "about the whereabouts of his son, who was tried in May 1995 but has not been released yet."

President Hussein ordered the release after a meeting with Leith Shbeilat, a main opposition leader and head of the Jordan Engineers Association. However, government officials have maintained that Baghdad informed them of the release before the meeting with Mr. Shbeilat.

Deputy Ahmad Annab asked the government to elaborate on the role of Mr. Shbeilat in securing their release and asked whether his initiative to travel to Baghdad and meet with President Hussein was personal or upon the request of the government.

Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour answered that Mr. Shbeilat went on his own.

"The government did not assign Mr. Shbeilat this task, nor did it discuss the matter with him," Dr. Ensour said.

Officials have said President Hussein decided to release them to improve his image in Jordan, banished by the December execution of four Jordanians for smuggling spare auto parts out of Iraq. But many have questioned why he snubbed official efforts to win their freedom and opted to release them upon the visit of a leading opposition figure.

Jordan was one of Iraq's main Arab allies until 1995, at which time it gave asylum to top Iraqi defectors and began calling for democratic reforms. It also allowed a few Iraqi opposition groups to set up offices in Jordan, which remains dependent on Iraq for its oil supplies.

During yesterday's session, Islamist Deputy Mohammad Azaideh and lawmaker Salameh Hiari criticised the government for adopting a new strategy of appointing women as directors of male public schools.

"We are an Arab, Islamic and conservative society. How will this reflect on our generation and society?" asked Mr. Azaideh. "If male directors, holding sticks, are unable to discipline our students, then how will female directors be able to achieve that? How will female directors discipline men?"

Dr. Ensour defended the move, saying it was an administrative measure, not an attempt to "feminise education as some of you have called it."

He said the measure "does not violate our religion [or] traditions, nor our beliefs and is followed in countries all over the world."

Turning to the Zarqa governorate, Deputy Mansour Murad said Azraq's salt factory — on which more than 10,000 families depend for their livelihoods — is suffering due to unofficial competition by the local potash factory.

"It was agreed that the potash factory would export its product, leaving the Azraq factory to sell its product in the local market and in Iraq," he said.

The government told Mr. Murad it would ask the potash factory not to compete with the salt factory.

Yousef Shreideh, first deputy speaker, said many citizens from the Southern Shouma area were complaining of polluted drinking water and some were even hospitalised.

The government promised Dr. Shreideh that it would take care of the matter and give it due attention.

Meanwhile, the House resumed its discussion of a draft customs law, which was interrupted by the five-day marathon debate of the draft 1998 state budget. A total of 203 articles out of the law's 258 have now been endorsed.

Press association approves new retirement rules, increases pension

By Alia Shukri Hamzeh
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The Jordan Press Association (JPA) has approved new retirement rules for its members and hiked the pension for journalists from JD100 to JD150.

Fakhri Abu Hamdeh, a member of the JPA council and director of its office, told the Jordan Times that raising the pension came in response to a request by the JPA general assembly two months ago and that it will be paid from the journalists' pension fund, which is separate from the association itself.

He added that around 12 journalists are expected to retire this year. According to the new rules, journalists beyond the retirement age of 65 can postpone their retirement and continue working for as long as they wish without continuing to pay into the benefits fund.

"The association would not pension any member, unless he or she desired it," he said.

According to Mr. Abu Hamdeh, 25 years of service or more are required to receive the JD150 per month pension. Those who retire before completing the 25 years will receive a lower pension, he said.

"Journalists who wish to retire this year will have to wait until March 1998, because if they retire now they won't receive the new pension, but rather the old one," Mr. Abu Hamdeh said.

According to JPA sources, the new rules increase membership fees from JD20 to JD30, while the monthly contribution remains at JD10.

Mr. Abu Hamdeh said the new rules have to be passed by the Council of Ministers before implementation.

The JPA has around 367 members, of which about 100 are civil servants with the state-owned Jordan News Agency, Petra. According to Mr. Abu Hamdeh, the association aims to increase that number through new rules dealing with pensions and better health insurance.

NAF examining increase in maximum monthly aid

AMMAN (J.T.) — The National Aid Fund (NAF) is studying the prospect of raising the JD60 per month ceiling of financial aid to needy families, according to the NAF Director, General Adel Shamaileh.

Dr. Shamaileh was quoted by the Arabic daily Al Ra'i on Saturday as saying that the NAF board is scheduled to discuss new rules concerning the monthly aid after the fund's management has completed a general survey on the number and status of needy families currently receiving aid. The survey is due to be completed in April.

Dr. Shamaileh was quoted as saying that the survey will provide the NAF board with facts about the needy families receiving aid and the social changes that have affected them. Aid will then be distributed to these families based on the results of this study, he added.

Increasing the amount of monetary aid, Dr. Shamaileh noted, is linked to many factors, including the number of family members.

During the month of Ramadan, he said, the NAF has given approximately JD4,000 in extra financial aid to poor people in all of the country's 12 governorates. The distribution of extra aid will continue until tomorrow, he added.

The fund, which provides aid to around 22,000 needy families, embarked on the comprehensive survey last June in order to revise its lists of needy families through a study of their living conditions and financial situation.

The NAF has also been providing soft loans to groups to begin small businesses after they have received appropriate training.

Minister praises role of voluntary groups, urges greater cooperation with government

AMMAN (J.T.) — Minister of Social Development Mohammad Mansour has said voluntary groups operating in Jordan are relieving the state of a heavy burden and shouldering part of the responsibility in caring for the orphans and needy.

The minister, who was speaking during an inspection visit to the Theodore Scheller School in the Marka district in east Amman, urged all non-governmental organisations and voluntary groups to increase their cooperation with the Ministry of Social Development to address social problems and safeguard the social structure.

Dr. Mansour said the time has come for modernising Jordanian legislation in a manner that would open the way for the private sector to expand its role in establishing social institutions, which he said can help the ministry deal with numerous social issues and care for orphans, the handicapped, and the aged.

During the visit, the minister met with the school's director general, Kamal Farah, and board members and inspected the school's classes, which offer training to some 250 students in welding, woodwork, auto repair, and blacksmithing.

According to Dr. Farah, the school, which was established in 1966, is being financed by the Evangelical Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East, as well as churches in Germany.

Dr. Farah said nearly 50 per cent of the trainees are orphans, while the rest come from needy families and are involved locally while the remaining 72 were non-Jordanian.

He said 28 of them had acquired AIDS through blood transfusions they had abroad. Many of the others acquired it through engaging in sexual contact outside Jordan, Dr. Kharabsheh said.

Seventeen haemophilic children were infected in Jordan after receiving blood factors used in the treatment of haemophilia.

Lack of popular education about AIDS, especially in schools — home to over 1.5 million students — is a major problem hindering AIDS awareness campaigns.

Though a handful of elitist private schools often discuss AIDS as part of "awareness" classes held once a year, school and university educational curricula does not discuss ways of preventing AIDS.

Most families ignore discussions of the subject at home.

Dr. Kharabsheh said school and university curricula were currently being updated to include sexual education.

"We should not ignore the fact that living in a conservative culture, and having certain beliefs, would make the

AIDS patients in Jordan suffer in silence, shame

By Hind-Lara Mango
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Many of Jordan's AIDS patients are secretly battling the killer virus in a conservative society that has long shunned them.

Local doctors supervising victims of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) that causes AIDS say many of their patients lead miserable lives because they cannot even tell families of their infection with the global epidemic, mainly acquired through blood transfusions, sharing drug needles and sexual intercourse.

In many cases, psychiatrists and the National Committee for AIDS Prevention and Control (NCAPC) are the only ones to know about their plight.

"We have had some very nasty reactions in the past when an AIDS victim attempted to tell family members," said psychiatrist Walid Surhan.

In one incident, medical staff at a local hospital refused to treat a dying Jordanian AIDS patient who had come from France to see his family.

"When he went to the hospital to be given the necessary injection, the nurses and doctors panicked and refused to help," said Dr. Surhan.

The first case of AIDS in Jordan was discovered in 1986. Since then, a total of 174 AIDS cases have been registered, according to Sa'id Kharabsheh, a member of the NCAPC. Men accounted for 136 cases and women for 38.

Doctors say Jordan's AIDS pattern also changed over the past years despite strict social adherence to religious teachings that ban pre-marital sex as well as homosexuality.

"Unlike in the past, when

what's going on

EXHIBITIONS

- * Display of Noor Al-Hussein Foundation (NAF) products at the NAF Jordan Design and Trade Centre, off Wadi Sagra Street (Tel. 699141/2), until Jan. 31 (8:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.).
- * Installation by Jordanian artist Ali Jabri (until Jan. 27). Also displaying contemporary Arab artist exhibition (until Jan. 27) at Darat Al-Funun, Jabal Al Weibdeh (Tel. 643251).
- * Works by about a hundred artists from Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Lebanon and Jordan at Hammurabi Art Gallery, Gardens Street, until Feb. 20 (Tel. 5536098).

Other Events

- 02:00 - Jordanian Choir
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- 24:00 - Jordanian Choir

NEWS IN BRIEF

Government announces public holidays

AMMAN (Petra) — All ministries, public institutions and departments will be closed down on Jan. 28-31 on the occasion of Eid Al Fitr holidays, according to a communiqué issued Saturday by Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali.

New Royal Wings plane arrives

AMMAN (Petra) — His Royal Highness Prince Faisal on Saturday received a second Canadian-made Bombardier Dash 50-seat plane. The plane will operate on Royal Wings routes to Larnaca, Agaba and Cairo.

Majali hosts iftar for media

AMMAN (Petra) — Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali hosted an iftar at Al Hussein Sports City for reporters and journalists. Dr. Majali and the audience performed the Maghreb prayers.

The director and staff of the EUROPEAN UNION'S MEDIA JEMSTONE PROJECT

wish to extend their sincere condolences to the family of **MOHAMMAD AMIN** who died last Thursday. As Secretary General at the Ministry of Information he was a good friend of the project and a supporter of our work.

Kohl comes to German state to start major election campaign

HANOVER, Germany (AFP) — German Chancellor Helmut Kohl was set to make his first major appearance of the 1998 election campaign in Hanover Saturday ahead of Lower Saxony state polls on March 1.

Mr. Kohl and his Christian Democratic Union (CDU) are trying to bar the way to the main threat to them in general elections in September, Lower Saxony state Governor Gerhard Schröder of the opposition Social Democrats (SPD).

Mr. Schröder has made a double-or-quits type bet on the state elections, saying that if his score drops by two per cent he will not even seek the SPD nomination for chancellor in the federal vote.

The SPD is to decide on a candidate on March 16. Mr. Kohl, 67, will be making 11 campaign appearances in four weeks to help the young and inexperienced CDU candidate in Lower Saxony, Christian

Wulff, 38. Mr. Schröder, 53, opened his campaign last Sunday with a call for the Lower Saxony battle to be a prelude to the fight to unseat Mr. Kohl.

He told a crowd of some 10,000 gathered in three connecting circus tents in the state capital of Hanover that the time had come to change towards "a more humane politics and to change it in Bonn," the federal capital.

The rally was the first full-scale extravaganza of the 1998 campaign, in which four state elections starting with Lower Saxony precede the national election on Sept. 27.

Mr. Schröder says that even if Mr. Kohl has similar policies, the chancellor is no longer credible since he has been in office too long, with disastrous results in the form of record unemployment.

Opinion polls have been hard on Mr. Kohl. More than two out of three Germans, a total of 69 per cent, want to see his conservative coalition step down after general elections in September, according to the Emnid poll published Friday.

Polls also show that Mr. Schröder, a natural-born forceful politician, is the best candidate against the veteran Kohl, whom he would beat handily in general elections.

Mr. Schröder is more to the centre than his left-wing SPD rival Oskar Lafontaine, and has a pro-business policy that stresses getting industry competitive in order to create jobs rather than extending social welfare benefits.

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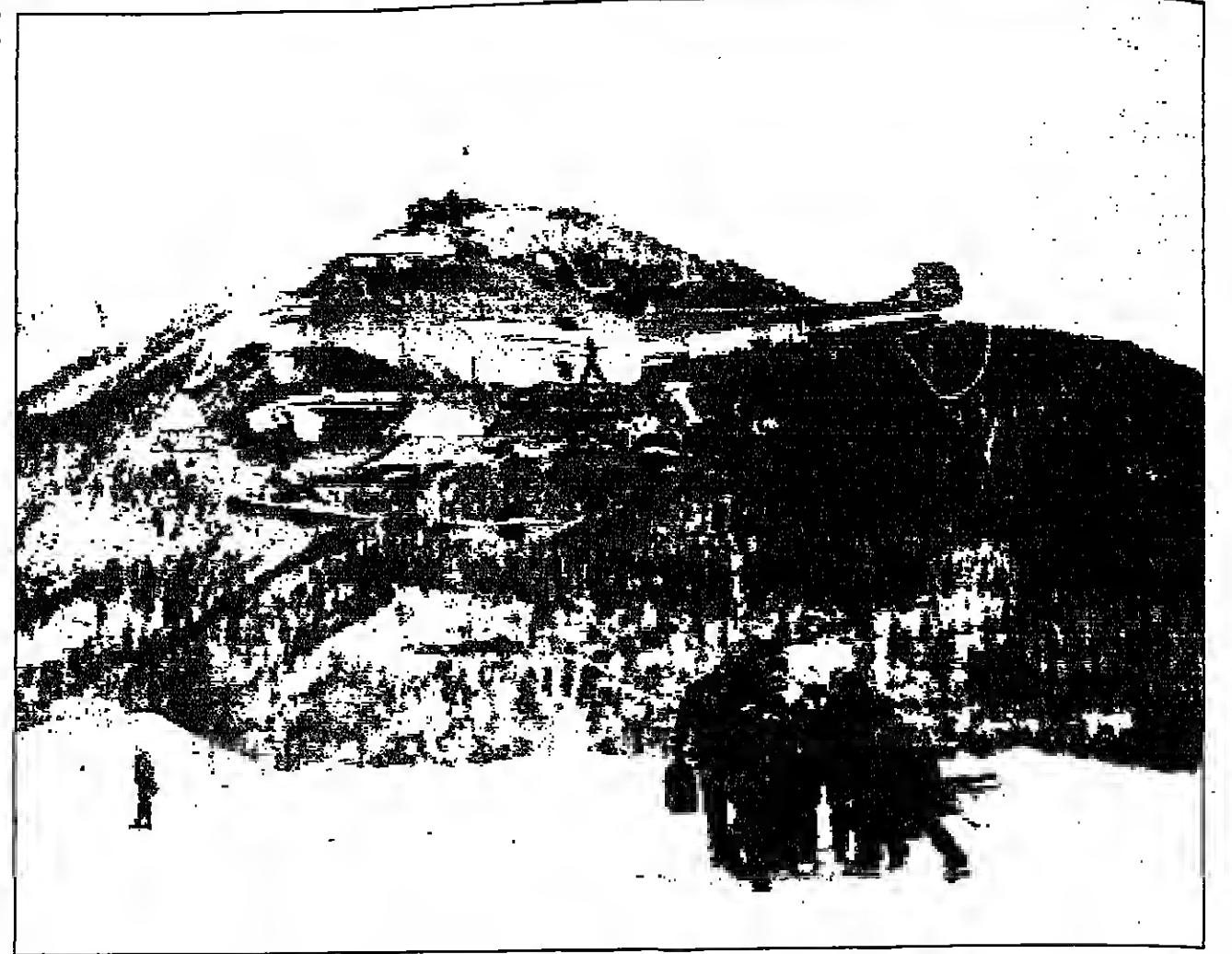
It was another bad sign for Mr. Kohl, facing perhaps his toughest electoral battle after 15 years in office and four terms as chancellor.

Unemployment running at over 4.5 million, a level unseen since the days of the pre-war Weimar republic, has tarnished Mr. Kohl's image.

However, another poll this week gave a lift to his reelection hopes, when it showed that German voters trust him more than the opposition parties to defend their interests over the coming European single currency.

Mr. Kohl was lagging in the polls and yet still won the three previous legislative elections, in 1987, 1990 and 1994.

He is banking this time on Germans deciding they need him for transition to the Euro and entry into the 21st century, just as they chose his hand on the rudder for the 1990 reunification of Germany.



A helicopter from the French Civil Security lifts off after dropping off rescue workers at an emergency command post near Orres in the southern French Alps (AFP photo)

Shocked parents visit French avalanche dead, hurt

GRENOBLE, France (R) — Shocked parents made a grim round of hospitals in France's Alpine southeast Saturday to visit survivors and mourn the dead from an avalanche in which nine children died.

Two adults, who had been guiding the cross-country trek as part of a junior high school holiday trip, also died in Friday's disaster, the worst of its kind in France since 1970.

Some 50 parents were being escorted by local officials and Secretary of State for Health Bernard Kouchner to hospitals and to a temporary chapel where the dead and injured had been taken.

Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, accompanied by two ministers, travelled to the area to meet the survivors. "This catastrophe, which has plunged the St. Francis of Assisi school in Montigny-le Bretonneux into mourning, has saddened the whole nation," Mr. Jospin's office said in a statement.

President Jacques Chirac also expressed sorrow over the disaster. Police opened an investigation to determine whether there had been any violations of the law.

Officials said the trekkers were hit by a fast-moving, 300-metre long wall of snow as they walked in wooded mountains near the ski resort of Les Orres, close to the Italian border.

More than 100 volunteers and paramilitary gendarmes with sniffer dogs had combed the area into the night, prodding through the deep snow with long poles to look for the missing people.

The rescue operation was hindered by the terrain, with a number of trees, uprooted by the force of the avalanche, lying buried beneath the snow.

Organisers of the school trip said the group included 32 children from the Saint Francis Junior High School in the town of Montigny-le Bretonneux, near Paris.

The teenagers had been accompanied by two teachers, four trained mountaineers and two other adults. None of the dead were named. Officials said they

believed the avalanche had been triggered by the group of young trekkers themselves. Authorities had earlier speculated that it might have been caused by a group of people skiing further up the mountain outside authorised runs.

Authorities had issued repeated avalanche warnings this week throughout the French Alps after recent heavy snowfalls and high winds had left the area unstable.

Local residents said the school group, led by experienced trekkers, had been walking along an authorised route at an altitude of around 2,400 metres, when the avalanche struck soon after 1230 GMT Friday.

The two deadliest avalanches in recent French history took place in 1970. In February of that year, 39 people died and other 37 were injured when an avalanche buried a holiday chalet in the Alpine town of Val d'Isère.

Two months later, 74 people died including 56 children when a blanket of snow buried a sanatorium at the Plateau d'Assy.

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Freed dissident refuses to speak to foreign press

BEIJING (AFP) — Zhou Guoqiang, a Chinese dissident freed Tuesday after more than three years in a labour camp, is refusing to speak to the foreign media for fear of reprisals, a friend said Saturday.

"He does not want to speak to foreign journalists. He is at his in-laws' home for some rest," the friend told AFP by telephone.

Contacts with foreign journalists in the past have led to arrest and sentencing for dissidents. Zhou Guoqiang was a

principal author of the "Peace Charter" in 1993. He had been held at a camp at Shuangqing in the northeastern province of Heilongjiang.

The 39-year-old lawyer was jailed in September 1994 for three years for "incitement to riot and disturbing social order." He then received another year for a reported escape attempt which his relatives denied.

Mr. Zhou's friend said the dissident, who was in relatively good health, did not hear of the release of

China's best known dissident Wei Jingsheng until his own release.

Meanwhile, police detained dissident Shen Liangqing for questioning for three hours Friday evening over his open letters to the authorities and the foreign press.

Mr. Shen told AFP police had banned him from leaving the city of Hefei in the eastern province of Anhui to go home to his family in Anqing, 150 kilometres to the south, for Lunar New Year on Jan. 28.

Heavy snowfall paralyzes traffic in Japan

TOKYO (AFP) — Heavy snowfall brought flight cancellations at airports along the Sea of Japan Saturday, causing delays in bullet train services and disrupting traffic on expressways, officials said.

A total of 79 domestic flights were called off, with several more cancellations expected, airline officials said.

The meteorological agency issued a warning against heavy snowfall for regions along the Sea of Japan coast and mountainous areas, estimating snowfall of up to 80 centimetres by Sunday evening.

"Shinkansen" bullet trains were operated at slower speeds, resulting in delays in services from northern Japan to western Japan.

With trucks slipping on icy roads amid storms, traffic was suspended at several locations on expressways in central and western Japan.

Earlier in the month, one man died and more than 500 others were injured in the heaviest snowfall in Tokyo for two years.

Pakistan to take 238,000 stranded nationals from Bangladesh

ISLAMABAD (AFP) — Pakistan Saturday expressed its "firm" commitment to repatriate 238,000 stranded Pakistanis from Bangladesh and appealed to citizens to donate funds for the purpose.

"The present government has firmly renewed its pledge to do all it can to bring and rehabilitate these stranded Pakistanis," said an official statement, carried by the official Associated Press of Pakistan news agency.

The statement appealed to citizens for "generous" contributions to a international trust launched for the "noble cause" by the Saudi Arabia-based relief organisation, Rabita Al-Alam Al-Islami, and Pakistan in 1988.

Hundreds of Pakistanis, known as Biharis, were repatriated in 1992 during current Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's earlier term in office, but the process was halted after Benazir Bhutto succeeded him in 1993.

The repatriated families were resettled in housing units built by the Rabita trust in Punjab, Mr. Sharif's home province.

The Pakistani pledge followed Mr. Sharif's talks with Bangladeshi counterpart Sheikh Hasina Wajed in Dhaka earlier this month

after a three-nation economic summit with her and Indian Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral.

"The present government has firmly renewed its pledge to do all it can to bring and rehabilitate these stranded Pakistanis, (who) number over 238,000 according to census carried out jointly in 1991-92," the statement said.

Some 932 families will be brought to Pakistan "within the next three months" and put up in housing units constructed by the Rabita trust at Mian Channu in Punjab, it added.

Out of a planned 41,500 housing units in various districts of Punjab, at an estimated cost of \$250 million, about 1,000 units have been completed at Mian Channu in 1994.

"Our gigantic humanitarian programme needs your attention and generous support," the appeal told Pakistanis, asking them to contribute money to two special bank accounts for donations in foreign and local currencies.

"These Pakistanis have been living under indescribable conditions in Bangladesh for over a quarter of a century for no reason other than their pride in calling themselves Pakistanis," it said.

Urdu-speaking Biharis originally migrated from

India to the then East Pakistan when the sub-continent was partitioned in 1947 after Britain ended its colonial rule.

They sided with Islamabad when East Pakistan fought a 1971 war of independence to become Bangladesh.

Invoking the Muslim holy book, the statement said "it is clearly the responsibility of all of us as ordained in the Glorious Koran" to attend to the needs of "these destitute brethren-in-Islam" who "are denied the freedom of movement even to earn their daily bread."

The government recalled "many obstacles" to the repatriation process in the past — apparently alluding to opposition from native populations in Pakistan's southern Sindh province, the home province of Bhutto.

Sindhi-speaking nationalist groups have said the repatriation would hurt their interests as most migrants from India after 1947 settled in Sindh and new arrivals were likely to join them.

Karachi's influential party, the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), representing the settler community, has demanded the repatriation go ahead. The party is a coalition partner of Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League.

Neo-Nazis, opponents clash on train

DRESDEN, Germany (AFP) — Around 250 extreme right-wing youths clashed with opponents on a train taking them to a neo-Nazi rally in the German city of Dresden Saturday morning, police said.

Several people were hurt in the violent scuffles. Supporters of the far-right National Democratic Party (NPD) party meanwhile began assembling in Dresden for the rally to protest against a controversial touring exhibition on the crimes of the Wehrmacht, the Third Reich's regular army.

A collective made up of left-wing organisations was planning to stage a counter-rally. In anticipation of trouble, around 3,000 police were being deployed from all over the country, with around 100 vehicles and helicopters.

The exhibition "Crimes of the Wehrmacht from 1941 to 1944" which explodes the myth that the regular army had clean hands, as distinct from the Nazi units, has aroused strong passions in Germany.

There have been demonstrations and incidents in practically every town and city through which the exhibition has passed, particularly in Munich, where thousands of neo-Nazis clashed with 10,000 counter-demonstrators in March last year.

German authorities authorised the NPD rally on the grounds that the party has not been declared contrary to the constitution. But they only gave permission for the counter-rally on condition that it is held at a distance.

The clash involved supporters of a Sunni extremist body, Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), and a Shiite political party, Tehreek-i-Jafria Pakistan (TJP).

Also Friday, a low intensity bomb planted on a motorbike exploded close to a TJP rally in the southern port city of Karachi, injuring two people.

In December five prisoners officially described as "dangerous terrorists" escaped from a jail in Dera Ghazi Khan in Punjab. The five belonged to a secret breakaway SSP group, Lashkar-i-Jhanvi, which claimed responsibility for the Lahore massacre.

The statement asked Americans residing or travelling abroad to pay "close attention" to their personal security.

U.S. government installations abroad have been instructed to review their security precautions, it added.

Following Mr. Kasi's earlier conviction by a trial jury in November, four Houston-based auditors with the U.S. oil company Union Texas were gunned down along with their Pakistani driver in the Pakistani port city of Karachi.

U.S. warns Americans of retaliation threat after Kasi death sentence

ISLAMABAD (AFP) — The United States Saturday warned Americans here of possible retaliation after a U.S. judge sentenced Pakistani national Aimal Kasi to death for killing two CIA agents.

"While we have no specific information of a threat, the potential exists for retaliation by Mr. Kasi's sympathisers against American interests," the American embassy here said, quoting a U.S. State Department worldwide advisory.

The statement asked

American residents or traveling abroad to pay "close attention" to their personal security.

U.S. government installations abroad have been instructed to review their security precautions, it added.

Following Mr. Kasi's earlier conviction by a trial jury in November, four Houston-based auditors with the U.S. oil company Union Texas were gunned down along with their Pakistani driver in the Pakistani port city of Karachi.

An unknown group called the Aimal Secret Action Committee claimed responsibility for the shootings and threatened other attacks on U.S. interests if Mr. Kasi was given the death penalty.

A U.S. federal judge Friday confirmed the sentence in court in Arlington, near Washington D.C. Capital punishment for 33-year old Mr. Kasi was recommended by a jury of six men and six women in mid-November.

A relative of Mr. Kasi has said the family planned to appeal the sentence all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Mr. Kasi killed the two Central Intelligence Agency employees and injured three other people on Jan. 25, 1993, by opening fire with an automatic weapon on cars waiting at a red light outside CIA headquarters.

He fled the U.S. for his home town of Quetta in southwest Pakistan but was arrested in Pakistan June 17 by U.S. officers during a commando raid and immediately extradited to the United States.

Police defy Pakistani anti-terrorism court order

MULTAN, Pakistan (AFP) — A Pakistani anti-terrorism court was embarrassed when police refused to honour a verdict sentencing three police officers to jail, sources said Saturday.

The police in Sargodha defied the order and later raided newspaper offices in the city to stop publication of the news about the sentence passed Thursday by Judge Chaudhry Iqbal Javed, they said.

Judge Iqbal, holding court in the city prison, sentenced the police officers to varying jail terms for faulty investigation in a high-profile sectarian murder case.

The policemen present in the court rejected the judge's order to arrest the three officers who walked out, and have been performing their jobs since then, the sources said.

The judge convicted two men of murdering Syed Tajammul Abbas, commissioner in Sargodha in Punjab province, before passing the order against the police officials.

Ahhas, a Shiite Muslim, was shot dead in Sargodha last year during a wave of sectarian violence that claimed 200 lives in Punjab, Pakistan's largest province.

One man was sentenced to life imprisonment and another to 10 years in jail for the assassination of the commissioner.

Mass circulation daily Jang reported Saturday policemen stormed printing presses, harassed workers and seized copies of newspapers.

The government set up the special speedy trial courts under the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) passed by parliament in August last year in a bid to curb sectarian killings. The law gives sweeping powers to the police.

Despite a crackdown, including detention of hundreds of suspected militants from the majority Sunni and minority Shiite Muslim communities, the violence has spilled into the new year.

On Jan. 11 some 24

Shiite Muslims were massacred when unidentified gunmen sprayed bullets at a religious gathering in a graveyard in the Punjab provincial capital of Lahore.

Friday, one person was killed and 10 injured during a sectarian clash in the town of Hangu in the North West Frontier Province, residents said.

The clash involved supporters of a Sunni extremist body, Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), and a Shiite political party, Tehreek-i-Jafria Pakistan (TJP).

Also Friday, a low intensity bomb planted on a motorbike exploded close to a TJP rally in the southern port city of Karachi, injuring two people.

In December five prisoners officially described as "dangerous terrorists" escaped from a jail in Dera Ghazi Khan in Punjab. The five belonged to a secret breakaway SSP group, Lashkar-i-Jhanvi, which claimed responsibility for the Lahore massacre.

Vedrine says China to ratify U.N. rights charter

HONG KONG (AFP) — French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine said here Saturday that Chinese officials in Beijing assured him the U.N. rights charter signed by President Jiang Zemin would be ratified by parliament.

"People I spoke to in Beijing said the pact will be sent to parliament and it will be ratified," Mr. Vedrine told a news conference in the former British colony where he spent a day after meeting with Mr. Jiang and other top Chinese officials in Beijing for two days.

Chinese officials, however, did not give a timetable of when the U.N. pact will be ratified.

"They spoke of it as being obvious that it will be ratified since they seriously discussed it before signing so I did not feel that there might be a problem ratifying it," Mr. Vedrine said shortly before leaving Hong Kong for India where French President Jacques Chirac began an official visit Saturday.

China signed the U.N. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights last year and pledged to sign a twin agreement on civil and political rights in the near future. Mr. Vedrine said Beijing officials told him the new parliament which will take office in March will "examine and study" the sister U.N. charter on civil and political rights.

He said China has asked France to assist Beijing officials in studying the issue.

"We, of course, agreed and it will take place as soon as possible," Mr. Vedrine said.

China appears to have launched a fresh offensive to win over critics of its human rights policies as it officially extended an invitation this week to U.N. human rights commissioner Mary Robinson to visit the country.

Beijing authorities also announced during Mr. Vedrine's visit that a delegation from the International Committee of the Red Cross would arrive in February to seek permission to visit detainees.

The French foreign minister said France and China have forged a "true partnership" and he expressed confidence that Hong Kong would overcome the current economic turmoil in Asia.

Mr. Vedrine met Hong Kong Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa and confirmed Mr. Tung would visit France in March. Mr. Vedrine also lunched with local business leaders. "We feel that things have gone well and are still going well. We feel this is a good omen for the future," he said.

"Europe, as a whole, and France should step up its relations with Asia," he said, adding that Paris is urging French companies to be "ever more present and to set up real relations when acting in China or Hong Kong."

"Despite the effects of the present crisis, these are countries of great potential so France should intensify its political dialogue [with Asia]," he said.

Mr. Vedrine confirmed with Chinese officials that Prime Minister Lionel Jospin would visit China later this year with six ministers.



U.S. President Bill Clinton poses with the 1995 class of White House interns, including Monica Lewinsky, in front of the South Portico of the White House in Washington in this 1995 file photo. The lawyer for Monica Lewinsky (3rd row, 5th from left), the 24-year-old former White House intern at the centre of an alleged sex scandal involving President Clinton, charged that Whitewater prosecutor Kenneth Starr squeezed his client to get information by threatening to involve her parents (Reuters photo)

India's Congress party snubs ex-PM Rao in polls list

NEW DELHI (AFP) — India's once-dominant Congress party Saturday said it would not select scandal-tainted former prime minister P.V. Narasimha Rao as a candidate in upcoming national elections.

Congress President Sitaram Kesri said after releasing the party's manifesto for the February-March polls that Mr. Rao was being dropped for his failure to stop the razing of the historic Babri Mosque by Hindu fundamentalists in 1992.

Mr. Rao was prime minister when the mosque was torn down. The desecration led to nationwide Hindu-Muslim clashes which claimed some 2,000 lives and severely dented India's credentials as a secular state.

The Congress manifesto for the first time formally apologised for the mosque's razing. India is home to around 120 million Muslims who make up around 12 per cent of the population of 960 million.

Mr. Kesri said: "We are not giving Rao an election ticket over the Babri mosque issue."

He denied Mr. Rao was being axed because of pending corruption charges against him.

The move sparked an angry reaction from Mr. Rao, who was prime minister between 1991 and 1996 when the 112-year-old party suffered its worst electoral defeat.

"I do not think this can be a ground for denying me a ticket... this is wrong, untrue, unfair and totally contrary to facts," an agitated Mr. Rao told reporters.

He said he could not be singled out.

"We (this government) faced the tragedy together. I was distraught... it was a period of great emotional stress."

Mr. Rao said a former Congress government of assassinated Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had allowed Hindu fundamentalists to hold a religious ceremony at the disputed site before the mosque was torn down.

Gandhi's Italian-born widow Sonia, the Congress' star campaigner in the current elections, recently said her husband had been willing to give up his life to protect the mosque. Gandhi was killed in 1991.

Mr. Rao, when questioned about Gandhi's statement, replied acidly: "If I had not

been there perhaps this trouble would not have started."

Mr. Rao was credited with launching reforms to open India's economy in 1991 but the end of his tenure became marred by allegations of corruption.

He now faces two separate trials for corruption. He stands accused of bribing opposition members of parliament to vote for his government in 1993 and is also charged with involvement in a \$100,000 bribe from a businessman in return for favours.

The upcoming polls are expected to result in a hung parliament, with the dominant Hindu nationalists and the Congress emerging as the two largest parties.

The Congress, however, has been wrecked by infighting, defections, corruption scandals and a waning electoral appeal since 1996.

Corruption has emerged as a central election issue.

India's Election Commission has ordered all contestants to prove they do not have a criminal record after revealing that 1,500 of around 14,000 contestants in 1996 had convictions for murder, rape, robbery and kidnapping.

White House paralysed as former aide negotiates deal to tell all

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The scandal of President Bill Clinton's alleged sexual tryst with a young intern took a dramatic turn early Saturday with the woman in question apparently ready to talk about the affair.

Former White House intern Monica Lewinsky is willing to admit to an affair with Mr. Clinton and give details about it in exchange for immunity from prosecution, the New York Times reported Saturday.

What in other circumstances would have been merely a sordid scandal has ballooned into a threat to the presidency itself because it could show that Mr. Clinton lied under oath in a recent deposition, opening him up for possible impeachment from Congress.

Ms. Lewinsky, 24, is however not ready to accuse either Mr. Clinton or presidential adviser Vernon Jordan of asking her to deny the affair under oath, the Times reports, citing investigators involved in the case.

Negotiating immunity from prosecution for herself in exchange for cooperating with special counsel Kenneth Starr, who is investigating presidential improprieties, is one way she could retract earlier sworn testimony and still avoid perjury charges.

Mr. Starr has rejected the initial offer, apparently because he is seeking information that would incriminate the president even further, the Times reported.

Talks between Mr. Starr and Ms. Lewinsky's lawyer, William Ginsburg, are likely to continue over the weekend.

If Ms. Lewinsky is willing to refrain from accusing Mr. Clinton and Mr. Jordan it would clear the two men from charges of obstruction of justice.

However it would deeply embarrass the president, and still leave Mr. Clinton open to perjury for denying the relationship under oath when he testified last weekend in the Paula Jones sexual harassment lawsuit.

Details of the alleged affair have already begun to leak. Saturday the Los Angeles Times reported that Ms. Lewinsky said in secretly recorded conversations that she engaged in telephone and oral sex with Mr. Clinton.

Mr. Clinton often telephoned her at home late at night to engage in telephone sex, an unnamed source who heard the tapes told the Times.

In the recordings Ms. Lewinsky is heard saying that she engaged only in oral sex, as opposed to full sex, with the president, and that Mr. Clinton told her he did not consider such an act to constitute an affair.

Ms. Lewinsky worked at the White House from 1995-96. She was 21 when the alleged affair took place.

Mr. Clinton is now caught between his lawyers, who want him to be cautious and measured in his statements, and his political advisers, who want a quick, open and honest

public response.

Over the years Mr. Clinton has become famous for having a rapid-response team of political firefighters ready to douse any political brushfire that threatened him.

Mr. Clinton himself has promised to address the issue in detail as quickly as possible.

However aides have apparently concluded that Mr. Clinton should refrain from addressing the scandal before the all-important annual State of the Union speech, to be delivered Tuesday. CNN reported.

In the nationally televised presentation, the president addresses Congress and tells them how the country is doing, then details what his political agenda is for the year.

The delay in giving an explanation is clearly damaging the president's credibility. Mr. Clinton's favourable rating has dropped 10 percentage points to 50 per cent since last week, and 51 per cent now believe he does not have the proper moral character to be the nation's leader, according to a CNN-Time magazine poll.

By a 48-31 per cent margin, U.S. residents said they believe Mr. Clinton did have an affair with Ms. Lewinsky, and about the same number think he had affairs with other women since taking office in 1993.

Up to now the most damning evidence is in the hands of special counsel Mr. Starr, who is in possession of secretly

recorded tapes of Ms. Lewinsky describing both the affair and the cover-up attempts.

Mr. Starr expanded his probes of Whitewater and other White House affairs to include this episode after a co-worker, Linda Tripp, secretly taped Ms. Lewinsky and gave Mr. Starr the recordings.

On Jan. 16 FBI agents searched Ms. Lewinsky's home and confiscated some of her possessions, news reports indicated.

The possessions removed from Ms. Lewinsky's apartment included her personal computer, a dress and other clothes, a gold brooch and a book of poems by Walt Whitman.

Several of the items had been purchased at a gift shop located on Martha's Vineyard, an elite island community located off the coast of Massachusetts where Mr. Clinton has spent vacations on several occasions.

Some of the confiscated items were reportedly gifts to Ms. Lewinsky from Mr. Clinton.

One Mr. Clinton ghost from the past that has surfaced again is Jennifer Flowers, who claimed in 1992 to be then-presidential candidate Bill Clinton's lover.

Speaking late Friday on the CNN show Larry King Live, Ms. Flowers said she felt "vindicated" by reports that the president has admitted having a sexual encounter with her in his deposition in the Jones case.

Record number of HIV cases in Hong Kong in 1997

HONG KONG (AFP) — Health authorities here said Saturday that 181 new HIV sufferers were documented in 1997, marking a record number of infections registered in Hong Kong in a single year.

The new cases of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) pushed up the total number of people infected with the virus to 957, a government statement said. HIV leads to acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS).

The statement said 64 people with full-blown AIDS were reported in 1997 bringing the total number of confirmed cases up to 309.

It said 80 per cent of the transmissions were from sexual contact with 506 sufferers said to have acquired the virus through homosexual contact.

No information was available for the other 80 HIV patients.

Hong Kong AIDS workers conducted an AIDS awareness campaign along the railway line to Beijing last December. AIDS campaigners in the territory have been lobbying Hong Kong authorities to increase cooperation with China to combat the spread of AIDS, fuelled by flourishing cross-border prostitution.

Endeavour continues journey to Mir on schedule

MOSCOW (R) — The U.S. space shuttle Endeavour was on course Saturday to rendezvous with the Russian Mir space station and bring a replacement American astronaut by day's end, mission control said.

"Everything is going according to plan and there are no delays," mission control official Vladimir Kolosovskiy said.

Endeavour was to link up with Mir at 2014 or 2015 GMT Saturday for NASA's last exchange of crew members, dropping off Australian-born Andy Thomas and taking back physician Dave Wolf, 41, who has been on board since September.

An hour and a half later the Mir crew of two Russians and one American will open their hatch to the shuttle to welcome their first human visitors since September.

"They have shifted their sleep schedules to be able to work with the American crew. They started work today at 1:30 p.m. (0930 GMT) and were sleeping until then," said Mr. Kolosovskiy.

Endeavour, making its first visit to Mir, soared into orbit Thursday night from its Florida launch pad.

Mr. Thomas will be the seventh and last scheduled U.S. astronaut to live aboard Mir as part of a three-year cooperative programme between the United States and Russia.

But Yuri Koptev, the Russian space agency's director, said Friday that discussions were under way on a further NASA mission, to make use of Mir's orbiting laboratories until it is replaced by the

international space station in about two years.

The joint Mir missions were designed to pave the way for the start of cooperation between the United States and Russia on the international space station. Russia is due to launch the first module of the \$60 billion orbiting outpost in June.

Endeavour is also carrying about 2,025 kg of supplies and equipment for Mir, including a new air conditioning unit and a motion control computer to replace failed parts.

Endeavour, named after Captain Cook's ship, was making its first flight since an eight-month, \$50 million refit that equipped it for docking with Mir and the future international space station.

The trial, expected to last up to a month, is the highest test so far of "veggie libel" laws aimed at protecting agricultural producers from false claims against their products. Thirteen states, including Texas, have adopted the laws.

U.S. officials say BSE does not exist here, but last year banned the feeding of cattle protein to cattle.

Witness Bill O'Brien, head of plaintiff Texas Beef Producers, said the Winfrey show, aired on April 15, 1996, caused prices to fall by 7 cents a pound in one day.

It hammered home the message that U.S. beef was bad "with a video of cattle falling down, playing boom, boom, boom scary music in the background, sound bites of inaccurate information and Oprah over there cheerleading it on and putting her stamp of approval on all of it," he testified.

Mr. O'Brien said meat packers, after hearing about the show,

Oprah villified in court, adored outside

AMARILLO, Texas (R) — Inside the courtroom, television talk show hostess Oprah Winfrey was accused Friday of taking a \$10 million bite out of beef prices, but outside hundreds of fans gathered to serenade her with kazooos and shake her hand.

Whether she was a villain or a beloved star depended on where she was.

"It's kind of unusual because, you know, I'm not here to party exactly," said a bemused Winfrey outside the courthouse.

"It feels surreal to me because this is very serious what goes on during the day, and then have all these people screaming," she said, gesturing back toward the adoring fans standing behind police barricades.

Mad cow disease, or bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) forced the slaughter of 1.5 million cattle in Britain and is blamed in the deaths of at least 20 people. Scientists think BSE was spread by feeding cattle body parts of sheep with a related disease, scrapie.

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 Facsimile: 696183

E-mail: jtimes@go.com.jo

Web Sites: http://accessme.com/JordanTimes/

The Jordan Times is published daily except Fridays. Subscription and advertising rates are available from the Jordan Times advertising department.

Cuba in spiritual world

THE MULTI-PRONGED message that Pope John Paul II carried with him to Cuba during his current visit there will resonate for some time to come, given its spiritual and political dimensions. From his call for an end to the use of sanctions as a political weapon to stressing the need for adopting spiritual and human values as a way of life to encouraging people to stay put in their ancestral land, the Pope sought to leave a lasting impact by his message to the Cubans who still live under communist rule.

The Pontiff's rejection of the sanctions regime imposed long ago by the U.S. against Cuba went beyond the Cuban case since he criticised the very rationale behind the application of embargoes and boycotts as essentially detrimental to innocent peoples. This attack on the policy of applying sanctions against countries carries considerable weight since it comes from not a political or country leader but from a major religious figure.

In calling for the restoration of religious education in Cuba which was banned by Fidel Castro's communist regime, the Pope was basically saying that today's materialistic world could not survive without reintroducing spirituality as an important ingredient in it. The warm and spectacular reception he received from the people of the island suggests that after so many years of atheist doctrine, there continues to be hunger for spirituality whose flames may never be extinguished. It is probably in recognition of this fact that the Castro regime retracted its anti-religious dogma and renounced atheism as an official doctrine in 1992.

On other fronts, the Pontiff urged Cubans not to emigrate and to stay put in their homeland instead. Peoples should endeavour to better themselves in their own country, he told his audience. At the same time he called for democracy and the respect of human rights as indispensable conditions for the development of Cuba.

It is premature to forecast how Pope John Paul's visit will change things in and around Cuba, if it does at all. What is for certain is that quite a few changes must have taken place already for it to materialise now.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Ra'i's Fahed Fanek Saturday said Syria has raised the hue and cry over the Turkish-Israeli-U.S. military exercises in the Mediterranean as if these games were directed against it or served as an act of aggression directed only at Syria. Damascus also picked out Jordan as a hostile state colluding against Syrian interests only because Amman decided to send an observer to the exercises, Dr. Fanek said. He said Syria did not raise any complaint or protest against the gathering of the military armada in the Gulf region in a clear menace to Iraq and in fact had joined the U.S.-led coalition against Baghdad. According to the writer, Damascus cannot convince any sensible person that it is threatened by Turkey, Israel or other external forces because the Syrian-Israeli front along the Golan Heights is quiet and not a single Syrian shot has ever been fired on Israel after the 1973 war. Dr. Fanek said Syria's complaint about the military exercises accuses Israel and Turkey of harbouring aggressive designs against it is nothing but a smoke-screen to cover up for its collusion against Baghdad in the Gulf War and for assuming the role of safeguarding Israel's borders along the Golan front.

Al Aswaq's Rashid Hassan backed a proposal put forth by a group of Lower House deputies to hold public officials to account for their fortunes, saying that such a move can curtail corruption. Similar proposals were put on the agenda by the 11th and 12th parliaments but failed to muster sufficient force, and the drain of public funds has continued, recalled the writer. He said such proposals reflect a mature democracy and portray a trend on the part of the people's representatives towards transparency and gives Parliament credibility. Citing the case of Lebanon, the writer said that the country's former prime minister and intellectual Salim Al Huss had said that democracy in Lebanon was in name only, and failed to put an end to corruption which precipitated the civil war. He said now that the war is over the same form of democracy returned, and the country witnesses renewed corruption of a worse kind. Democracy reinforced by laws and steered by institutions is one that lasts and addresses such misconduct and abuse of power, said the writer. He said Parliament in Jordan should give democracy credibility by introducing and applying laws which hold officials accountable for their wealth and so put an end to all forms of bribery and abuse of power.

Sunday's Economic Pulse

What to do: Import factories or export manpower?

ONE OF our daily newspapers, perhaps Al Arabi Al Yawm, revealed that we have some 34 unauthorised offices, the business of which is to facilitate the transfer of unemployed Jordanian workers to Israel to find jobs in Israeli factories. Hundreds if not thousands of Jordanian workers left the country to Israel ostensibly for tourism or to visit relatives, but the real purpose of their travel was to find jobs and work illegally.

This trend is obviously not desirable from a Jordanian point of view, but it is unavoidable in light of pure economic considerations. The trend will only intensify with time as long as there is high unemployment in Jordan and an abundance of low level jobs in Israel. Supply and demand will inevitably find a way to meet, one way or another.

Jordan is not of course ready to set an iron curtain around its borders to prevent Jordanians from looking for job opportunities elsewhere including Israel. Likewise Jordan will not impose harsh restrictions and conduct investigations at the bridges with the West Bank and crossings with Israel. But even if such undesirable measures were taken, the Jordanian workers will definitely find a way to get into Israel. Therefore we should deal

with this phenomenon wisely and creatively.

First of all we have no right to blame workers for standing in lines for long hours at the gates of the Israeli embassy in Amman hoping to obtain visas and find a way to enter into Israel because we are unable to create enough jobs to cater for the unemployed. Everyone has a right to work and earn income to feed him/herself and his/her family.

Two options are open to the Jordanian policy makers: Either allow our workers to go and work in Israel at their own risk, or facilitate the transfer of Israeli factories, especially labour intensive ones such as textile factories, to Jordan, especially to industrial estates such as Al Hassan Industrial Estate in Irbid. To import Israeli factories to Jordan is obviously far better economically, politically and socially than exporting Jordanian manpower to Israel.

Several factories jointly owned and managed by Israelis and Jordanians are already in place and operating successfully, especially in Irbid and Zarqa areas. We have accumulated enough experience to convince ourselves that those factories did not come over to Jordan in order to dominate the Jordanian economy or to impose their

plans and designs over the government, the parliament, the justice system, the army, the interior security or any other aspect of Jordanian public life. Their only aim is to have access to cheap labour and make money. Those jointly owned and managed factories employ thousands of Jordanians and pay wages which are very low according to Israeli standards but quite satisfactory according to Jordanian standards. It is a win win relationship.

The participation of the Social Security Corporation (SSC) in the establishment of joint projects to build extracting and manufacturing industry is a wise step as long as such projects are located within Jordan and accordingly remain under absolute Jordanian sovereignty and fall within the authority of the Jordanian government and the jurisdiction of Jordanian laws.

Such industrial joint ventures or enterprises established in Jordan irrespective of ownership should be encouraged. They will enhance the Jordanian industrial sector, generate jobs and increase exports and foreign exchange earnings. Our labourers will work in Jordan and have the protection of the Jordanian labour law instead of going abroad unprotected.

The Middle East peace process: A South African perspective

By Aziz Pahad

THE SOUTH AFRICAN government has consistently and enthusiastically supported the Middle East peace process since its inception.

Indeed, South Africa continues unwavering in its conviction that only through peace will countries in the Middle East achieve their full potential and thereby attain the prosperity which their peoples deserve, and which we desire for them. It is for this reason that South Africa perceives the Middle East peace process to be the single most important development in the region currently and we will actively continue to encourage all countries to pledge their fullest commitment to this process.

This said however, South Africa will not stand by mute when we perceive that the actions of any of the parties to this historic process stand in blatant discord with the letter or spirit of commitments made in terms of the peace process, or when the unilateral actions of one party are universally perceived to prompt the creation of circumstances which potentially can have no other result than negative consequences which are predictable and indeed, inevitable.

In recent months the government of Israel has publicly suggested that they are being unfairly singled out for criticism and condemnation at a time when they are indeed moving forward "seriously" with the implementation of their commitments defined by the Oslo process.

There is however, a serious measure of disingenuousness inherent in such a statement, as it carries with it the suggestion that at a time when Israel is taking great risks with its security in order to meet its peace process obligations, the international community is rallying to support its opponents.

Such a suggestion is nothing more than a distortion of the truth by those who would like to create the impression that the international community is on the march once again to isolate Israel for reasons of global political expediency, or because of a perceived desire to destroy the Israeli state.

Indeed, let the record on this matter be clear. At a time — not so far distant — when Israel was seriously pursuing peace with its neighbours, the world beat a path to her door. The massive expansion in Israel's diplomatic representation since the start of the Madrid and Oslo processes is tangible proof of this.

What more poignant reminder need be given than the quite extraordinary expression of international solidarity with those who support the cause of peace in Israel than the sad gathering in November 1995 on the windy hills of Jerusalem which Deputy President Mbeki attended together with approximately 120 of the world's most senior leaders, to join that nation's people in laying to rest Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

who quite literally gave his life in the pursuit of peace. This was an unprecedented and resounding international demonstration of support to a nation and man who made a sacrifice for the cause of peace. It was just as powerful a statement of rejection to those who will turn to violence to try and stop the cause of peace.

If there is anything which South Africa has learned from its own process of peace making and reconciliation it is that violence can have no part in the quest for peace and South Africa will condemn and stand against those who use violence for such ends, whoever they may be.

If there is any region of the world where it is clear that actions always have consequences, it is most certainly in the Middle East. Indeed it is a tragedy that so much damage has been done to the cause of peace making since 1993 by those who have used violence to further their political aims. A violent extremist who has killed men at prayer in a mosque; those who have strapped explosives to their bodies and become human bombs; rogues in military uniforms who have sprayed bullets into crowded streets or killed young children at a picnic. Wicked people to whom the most resounding response the region can deliver, is the commitment that peace is unstoppable.

This was our answer to the men of violence in South Africa — and let no one doubt that if there was any issue which threatened to destroy our peace process, it was the widespread and indiscriminate violence which killed hundreds of innocent victims while negotiations proceeded.

South Africa's answer to these faceless men of violence was the commitment of our leaders to redouble their efforts to achieve peace and as the world has witnessed, against all odds we succeeded.

This is our hope for the Middle East. At the same time it must be understood clearly by the government in Israel, that the world has expectations of it. The present government's predecessors demonstrated a steadfastness to stay the course and to take risks for peace. They built and nurtured mutual trust and respect and treated their peace partners with esteem, regard and consistency.

For the past year-and-a-half, however, the present Israeli government has adopted another course. A zig-zag policy in which Israel moves from implementation of Oslo process commitments — for which fulsome praise was deserved and given — to short-term pandering to extremist constituencies for narrow domestic political advantage. A policy which is as insulting to Israel's peace partners as it is dangerous to the good health of the peace process and therefore to Israel's long-term security.

In the world of politics, perception is as important as reality. In this regard, it is a

reality that in the past 10 months, Israel's peace partners have turned from trust to increasing suspicion and hostility.

It is not sufficient for Israel's government to claim that it has shown good faith by withdrawal from Hebron and the release of prisoners. Good faith in peace making is based on much more than that. Most especially when the past year has revealed a negotiating strategy — based on a so-called commitment to bargain from a position of strength — which delivers a crass and "devil may care" response to warnings that opening a tourist tunnel in Jerusalem will have disastrous consequences. If further examples were needed, what of the gravely ill-conceived decision to build a Jewish settlement at Jabal Abu Ghneim or Har Homa. Israel states that this issue is complicated. The location straddles the Green Line and involves mostly Jewish-owned but also some Palestinian land. This is all true but the issue revolves not around these convoluted technical arguments raised in Israel's defence, but on the simple fact that the ill-advised timing of this decision which could have but one result — namely inflaming an already dangerous climate — has prompted a damaging, negative and at times dangerous reaction.

Instead of accepting that the Netanyahu government's own ill-advised and inconsistent policies, which have so poisoned the underlying foundations of trust so necessary to building peace, contributed directly to the climate of incipient violence now prevailing, Israeli spokesmen have retreated to the expedient of blaming their peace partners. The Palestinians are accused of giving the "green light" to terrorist bombers, while at the same time the Israeli government orders hit squads to assassinate political opponents in the capital of Jordan.

The lack of understanding for the negative consequences of its ill-conceived and inconsistent policies is precisely the reason why Israel stands so roundly condemned by the international community. It is also the reason for the ringing criticism of Israel's currently most consistent peace process interlocutor, King Hussein, who has asked Israel's current leaders why they seem bent on destroying all that he believes in and are deliberately humiliating their Palestinian peace partners.

Actions speak louder than words and Israel has a long road to walk currently, to restore faith in the historic peace process that has been so sorely tried this past year and more. The activities of the present Israeli government must not be equated with the wishes of the majority of the Israeli nation.

We take hope from public indications showing that a large majority of Israelis still support the peace process. Israel's people clearly yearn for peace as much as do others in this violence-blighted region. This

was reflected in the largest ever peace rally held in Tel Aviv during November 1997.

The recent resignation of Foreign Minister David Levy and the threatened resignation of Defence Minister Itzhak Mordechai are further indications of the fact that the present Israeli government is not accurately reading the mood of peace which is sweeping through the nation and indeed among more moderate streams of their own coalition.

South Africa can do no less than express its unequivocal support for the process of peace making and for the peace forces in the Middle East.

Our experience and the ethos of our society demand no less. Our own criticism of the Israeli government is predicated not upon hostility towards Israel, but purely upon our own analysis. This analysis is also shared by 135 members of the U.N. General Assembly who during 1997 voted in favour of two Emergency Special Session Resolutions of the General Assembly which condemned Israeli actions whose sole effect was to harm the core foundations upon which the peace process had been built so successfully since September 1993.

Violence has no part in the quest for peace; but all participants, if they are serious, have a duty to avoid aggressive, provocative and insensitive actions which can at best only undermine trust and at worst, lead to violent reaction. If one is committed to peace, one does not undermine one's negotiating partners for short-term political considerations. They are, after all, partners in the search for peace, rather than adversaries.

There is, we believe, no alternative to peace, and it is only through perseverance and through commitment to honest negotiation that the Middle East peace process can come to fruition. The realisation of such a peace will not only impact on the countries of the region, but inevitably also on the world as a whole. We therefore urge that the Israeli government does all in its power to avoid actions calculated to undermine the achievement of this goal, and to demonstrate in practice, its stated commitment to peace.

In this regard, we believe strongly that it would be futile and dangerous to re-write or re-interpret the Oslo agreement in a manner which seeks to move this agreement away from the carefully crafted foundations laid down by the accord's architects. The stability, security and development of the entire region will be guaranteed by the principle of "land for peace" rather than the present Israeli government's stated position of "peace for security".

The writer is South Africa's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. This article was forwarded to the Jordan Times by the South African embassy in Amman.

Where is the honour?

To the editor:

AFTER READING the article, Father Arrested For Killing One Week Old Daughter (Jan. 19, 1998), I didn't know if I should feel angry, sad or both. Then I opened the Jordan Times and read, Court Sentences Man To Six Month Imprisonment Term For Killing Sister. (Jan. 21). These two articles disturbed me very much.

First of all the question comes to mind: Where is there any honour in killing and taking a life? The young father who took his daughter's life because of his insecurity and his shameful act is unjustified. Did he honestly think that the "out of sight out of mind" philosophy would work? His wife carried that child for 9 months. Now this poor woman is grieving for her daughter whom she never knew and will never get to know as well as the loss of her husband who will be imprisoned. (Not to mention the mental anguish of knowing your spouse killed your child.)

To be ashamed of your actions is one thing, but too make yet again another bad choice is truly irresponsible. We are to accept the consequences and learn from them.

In the case of the young man who killed his sister in order to cleanse his family honour, how does this out of sight out of mind philosophy work again? A person makes mistakes. Your responsibility as a family member is to teach, to encourage, to be an example and to love each of the other family members. Prayer is another way to handle family matters. God's guidance is most needed and should be sought after and used.

In my humble opinion, I think life should be cherished. It is best to respect one's own life as well as others. After reading such articles in the paper, I have increased my prayer for all of us in Jordan. Honour and cleansing come from within a person and not from outer physical

appearances. Does what other people think mean more to you than your own flesh and blood? If it does, then why? I pray that you examine your own lives before playing God and judging and taking someone else's life.

Praying with you for wisdom.

Tammy L. Summey
 Amman

The injustice is to women

To the editor:

I HAVE written to the Jordan Times on several occasions addressing the horrible injustices and crimes committed against women in the name of so-called "honour," and strongly feel that any average decent person should not remain silent either. Reading another of Rana Hussein's reports (Jordan Times, Jan. 21, 1998) on a case in which a young man gets away with only six months imprisonment for killing his 19-year-old sister in order to cleanse his family's honour, not only makes me sick but totally shakes my trust in the judicial system and its practices.

The report goes on to say, that the offender received a reduced sentence because he committed the crime in an act of "fury and spontaneity." Naturally his family dropped the charges against him, and the court ruled out premeditation, although the defendant happened to be carrying the murder weapon at the time he committed the crime. How can anything be more absurd? I am neither a detective nor a lawyer,

but my human instinct tells me, that law and order in this country more often than not works in favour of male offenders, especially where crimes of honour are concerned. Dealing with women as a second rate commodity or possession is simply obscene, and bowing to customs with no religious backing whatsoever when passing judgement is totally uncivilised and shameful. Men and women were created equal in the eyes of God, and Islamic teachings clearly condemn discrimination and acts of prejudice against women in all sectors of life. Accordingly, both men and women are equally responsible for their deeds. Implanting the issue of power and pride, honour in males only intensifies men's desire to seek to treat women as inferior, dominate them and frequently resort to violence against them whenever a problem arises. If individuals are to take the law into their hands and commit crimes whether in a state of fury or insanity, and then get away with their wrongdoings, why are the state security and laws there in the first place? Isn't the state supposed to prosecute offenders even if charges against them were dropped by "concerned relatives"? It makes me also wonder, if lawmakers realise that a man who kills once can easily kill again and again, thus turning him into a potential threat to the community.

If the judicial system applied today was designed to serve a community with a far more different socio-economic structure and pattern of life during times when violence, abuse or any other criminal behaviour were less frequent, it seems that the time for change has come and laws for the protection of women and children should be amended in order to comply with the needs of a rapidly changing society.

Instead of continuously hickering during parliamentary sessions, deputies will hopefully sit down one day soon and come up with a concrete proposal for the adjustment of protection laws.

Mrs. Rumiana M. Nuseibeh
 Amman

Vanunu and Shahrastani deserve the Nobel Peace Prize

By Gwynne Dyer

—THE ATTITUDE toward my case needs to be on the ground of respecting my action as an act that helped all the world, even Israel.

—Mordechai Vanunu, 19 January, 1996

NOBODY HAS actually seen Mordechai Vanunu's face for 10 years except his two brothers, who take turns making the sole permitted fortnightly visit to Ashkelon prison, and the Israeli guards outside his 9 ft. by 6 ft. 13m by 2m cell. When his protests against solitary confinement occasionally get us far as a court appearance, his jailers cover his head with a mask. And he never gets any mercy.

Vanunu's crime, for which he was sentenced to 18 years in solitary confinement, was to fly to London in 1986 and tell the "Sunday Times" newspaper all he knew about Israel's nuclear weapons programme. He had been a low-level technician at Israel's nuclear facility at Dimona, but from the information and photographs he provided, experts were able to deduce that Israel then had between 100 and 200 nuclear weapons.

The Israel government, which has never publicly admitted (or denied) owning nuclear weapons, was furious at this revelation, and acted ruthlessly to silence him. A female Israeli agent lured Vanunu from Britain to Italy — where he was kidnapped, drugged, and shipped back to Israel in a crate for punishment.

But that was a long time ago, and there's nothing new on the case, so why bring it up now? Because 10 years is a good round figure that could capture the public imagination — and it's time for nominations for the next Nobel Peace Prize.

The Nobel Peace Prize is a tool, and applied to the right problem it can do wonders. It helps to protect democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi from the wrath of the generals who rule Burma, as it once protected nuclear physicist and peace advocate Andrei Sakharov from the anger of the Communist tyrants who ruled the old Soviet Union. It might help to free Vanunu, or at least end the vengeful cruelty of his solitary confinement.

This is an urgent matter, for there are signs that a whole decade alone is affecting Vanunu's mental stability. "They want to drive him mad," says his brother Asher. "They want to harm him. They want revenge," Dr. Ruhama Marton, an Israeli psychiatrist who addressed a pro-Vanunu conference in Tel Aviv last October, agrees.

"The most common feeling people in solitary confinement have is that of extreme and profound anxiety," said Marton. "The feelings of deep abandonment and deep anxiety, coupled with the factors of thought disorder and hallucinations, rapidly put a person into a constant state of doubt and uncertainty in which they may lose their self-confidence, self-esteem, and finally their identity." Vanunu has had 10 years of this.

But there is a problem with nominating

Vanunu for the Nobel Peace Prize: some are bound to see it as an anti-Israeli gesture rather than a campaign motivated by anti-nuclear and humanitarian sentiments. Fortunately, there is also a solution to the problem. He is called Dr. Hussein Shahrastani.

Shahrastani, like Vanunu, has spent a decade in prison for opposing the introduction of nuclear weapons in the Middle East, but he was rarely alone. He had torturers to keep him company, for he is an Iraqi, and the government whose nuclear ambitions he defied was that of Saddam Hussein.

Hossein Shahrastani trained in nuclear chemistry at the University of Toronto, and returned to Iraq to work in the government-run Atomic Energy Organisation at the time when Saddam Hussein was rising to supreme power. Shahrastani rose too, to become Saddam Hussein's chief scientific adviser — until the fateful day in 1979 when the Iraqi president ordered his scientists to start work on nuclear weapons, and Shahrastani defied him.

He was arrested on Dec. 4, 1979, and accused of treason. (As a Shiite Muslim, he was regarded as a potential traitor by the predominantly Sunni regime.) The torture began at once, and continued day and night. They tied his hands behind his back and then hoisted him into the air by them. "After a few minutes, the pain is so severe in your shoulders, the pain is unbearable." And then they applied an electric cattle prod to his genitals.

After 22 days the torture ended, but Shahrastani remained in Abu Ghoraibeh prison in Baghdad for a decade. For a time, security police moved into the house with his Canadian-born wife Bernice and their children Mohamed and Zahra, who saw him only once a month for the next 10 years. Once the regime offered to free the scientist if he would work on its nuclear weapons, but he refused.

Finally, miraculously, Shahrastani escaped from prison in one of the bombing raids on Baghdad during the Gulf War in 1991. He fled north with his family to Kurdistan, and from there was smuggled into Iran. He and his wife live in Tehran today, running an Iraqi refugee aid organisation.

Hossein Shahrastani is a brave and just man who would deserve a nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize on his own merits. But he would never be awarded it on his own, any more than Mordechai Vanunu would. The politics of the rival nationalisms, Arab and Israeli, would get in the way.

A joint nomination of Vanunu and Shahrastani, on the other hand, would have an impartiality and a symmetry that rose above such considerations. They have each paid a great price for acting as their conscience dictates, and they deserve recognition. But most importantly, the Nobel Peace Prize is a tool that could save Vanunu by embarrassing the Israeli government into releasing him.

Vanunu has no more secrets to reveal, and there is no reason except revenge for Israel to keep him in such terrible isolation. He needs help from outside, and he is entitled to it.

El Nino creates micro Gold Rush in California

SAN FRANCISCO (AFP)

El Nino-spawned storms are washing gold nuggets from their centuries-old resting places and into the hands of gold panners in northern California rivers — just in time for the 150th anniversary of the Gold Rush.

"El Nino will stir up a lot of gold and open a lot of gold veins," said Mike Smerker, whose grandfather was a Gold Rush prospector. "This year, it won't matter what creek you pan in ... Any creek with enough water in it to pan ... go ahead and try."

The storms battering California this winter are promising to replicate the rain that soaked James Marshall when he made his historic discovery of gold in a creek at Sutter's Mill on Jan. 24, 1848.

Almost overnight, tens of thousands of treasure seekers who would come to be known as "Forty-Niners" raced to the untamed country at the base of the Sierra Nevada foothills to seek their fortunes.

A re-enactment of Marshall's discovery was planned for Saturday, when counties throughout California's gold territory plan to launch a two-year bash of parties, parades and other events celebrating the Gold Rush.

People interested in reliving the era can take trips with companies such as Gold Prospecting Expeditions in Jamestown or

Gold County Prospecting in El Dorado County.

"We get people who just want to try prospecting once and others who want to learn it so they can do it on weekends or during their vacations," said Joan Bailey, who runs Gold County Prospecting. "The toughest part about prospecting now is finding a place on the river to dredge."

Marshall was helping German-born Swiss businessman John Sutter build a sawmill on the river. Sutter had managed to get a grant of 19,200 hectares of land at the junction of the American and Sacramento rivers where he planned to develop a magnificent ranch. Marshall's discovery of gold in the river ended those plans.

Virtually the entire population of San Francisco left their homes, crops and livestock as gold fever spread to the coast. In their frenzy to find their fortunes, treasure-seekers forced local Indians onto reservations or killed them in order to stake claims along the rivers.

Rivers were diverted and oak and redwood forests destroyed in the frenzied quest for fast riches. An estimated 12 billion tonnes of earth dug up by miners was dumped into local rivers, killing wildlife and burying farmland.

While individuals panned for gold or washed the river soil through large

metal screens in boxes called "sluices," companies hauled in pressurised hoses to wash away entire riverbanks and hillsides.

It is believed that fewer than half of the 90,000 people, most of them men, who set out for California by land or sea got there. The rest died on the way or turned back.

Most of the miners did not get rich. However, gold quickly lined the pockets of the merchants who sold shovels, food and other supplies to treasure hunters.

It was a lawsuit filed in a San Francisco court by farmers claiming that mining was annihilating farmland that brought the Gold Rush to a close.

Both Marshall and Sutter died penniless.

Most of the river banks that the Gold Rush prospectors rushed to are now private property and off limits to visitors. People have built homes on the riverbanks.

Gold Prospecting Expeditions owns the mile-long stretch of Woods Creek where it takes aspiring gold hunters. On the bank of the river is a replica of an authentic 1849 miners' camp.

"The secret to finding gold is knowledge... you have to know what you are doing," said Mr. Smerker, who works for Gold Prospecting Expeditions. "If you don't do it right, all you get is tired and your back really hurts."

Environmentalists push for central incinerator to dispose of hazardous medical waste

By Ahmad Al Khatib
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Jordanian hospitals and the government are trying hard to get rid of thousands of tonnes of medical waste while ensuring minimum harm to the environment.

But environment experts warn that in the absence of a central incinerator to burn waste from the Kingdom's over 40 private and public hospitals, efforts to dispose of medical refuse will continue to be hampered.

"At the moment there is no comprehensive solution to totally get rid of medical waste," engineer Haydar Rabuh'ah from the General Corporation for Environment Protection told the Jordan Times.

"This would be a temporary solution, until we can find adequate financing to set up a central incinerator that can handle all kinds of medical refuse," said the engineer handling chemical materials and hazardous waste at the public department.

Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali has ordered the formation of a specialised committee to look into solutions for medical waste as part of efforts to find a comprehensive solution to garbage dumping.

The committee has asked the government to earmark JD 3.5 million from the 1998 budget as part of an emergency plan that entails setting up the first stage of the Swaga hazardous waste dump.

The provisions include JD 1.5 million to establish Jordan's first central incinerator to handle medical refuse.

But Mr. Rabuh'ah said no decision had been reached yet on whether the central burner will be situated at the Swaga dump, 120 kilometres south of Amman, or at Wadi Qattar, east of Amman.

Instead of burning it on site, hazardous waste occasionally finds its way into Jordan's main domestic

garbage dump at Russeifa, near Amman.

The Ministry of Finance has asked the General Corporation for Environment Protection to cooperate with the Industrial Development Bank to secure financing for the overall JD16 million waste dump scheme at Swaga, 60 kilometres south of Amman.

A Danish firm has suggested the creation of a \$28 million garbage dump at the same site.

to get rid of medical refuse, they still need a comprehensive solution to solve such dilemmas," said Mirvat Arrar, head of the nursing department at the Speciality Hospital.

According to Mazen Khalil, head of the Ministry of Health Department for Environmental Health, 15 per cent of hospitals' refuse are hazardous waste.

"Usually, hospitals have their own incinerators," he said. "If a

dunum Russeifa dump where it is burnt and buried in levels — forming terraces to prevent decomposed and poisonous materials from rising to the surface of the ground, according to S'ad Ribadi, head of GAM's cleaning department.

The procedure, known as "land-cell terracing" began in 1989 after the World Bank gave the GAM JD 4 million.

The GAM treats over 60 per cent of Jordan's waste collected from its 20 districts and from nearby governorates, including Zarqa, home to more than 750,000 Jordanians.

Russeifa residents have long suffered from foul odours and other pollutants emerging from the dump.

Deputy Mansour Murad, a long-time opponent of all governments, gave Dr. Majali's cabinet a vote of confidence in December after the premier promised to look into possibilities of moving the site of the Russeifa dump.

Zarqa houses 40 per cent of Jordan's factories which produce a range of commodities — from detergents to food.

Many environment activists and doctors remain divided on whether the burning of medical waste is providing a grass-roots solution.

"I do not think so," said Ahmad Al Qasem, assistant administrative manager at the Islamic Hospital in Amman, when asked whether incineration helped eradicate the problem of medical waste.

"For example, hospitals in Jordan cannot be exactly sure about the outcome of the process, including released gases."

"But we have no other choice. It is better than just burying them and leaving them to decompose," Mr. Qasem told the Jordan Times.

"We still look forward to a central incinerator as a solution."

'The most important issue in such projects is how to manage and control the process of treating hazardous waste without harming the environment.'

Mr. Rabuh'ah said the site will be chosen after proper studies are conducted to ensure safety of the area's population, vegetation, and fossil water supplies.

"The most important issue in such projects is how to manage and control the process of treating hazardous waste without harming the environment," Rabuh'ah said. "Experts must deal carefully with some of the poisonous outcomes resulting from incineration."

Some officials have suggested that the private sector be allowed to help in supervising the medical refuse treatment project.

Meanwhile, officials said the Ministry of Health was supervising the process involving the destruction of medical waste that is put in red plastic bags — to distinguish it from domestic waste that is placed in black garbage bags.

But many environment experts fear control measures remained lax.

"Despite the cooperation between some hospitals in Amman

hospital lacks a burner, it co-operates with another hospital to get rid of their refuse," Mr. Khalil said.

Hospitals said they had to grapple with different kinds of waste.

"The most dangerous waste is the one that comes from patients who have a contagious disease," said Ms. Arrar. "We immediately burn all such refuse."

Human remains, such as amputated legs and arms, are given to their owners along with death certificates to enable them to bury these parts.

"Laboratory refuse is melted in special autoclaves, organic refuse is burned in the hospital's incinerator while plastics refuse is taken by Greater Amman Municipality (GAM)."

Paper and cardboard materials are sold for recycling, while tools used for culture tests at hospital labs are sterilised before being incinerated.

The GAM ferries 2,100 tonnes of waste a day collected from homes, hospitals and plants to the 800-

Thais return to musical roots as economic crisis bites

By Thanaporn Pranyanyal
Agence France Presse

BANGKOK — Luk Thung, Thailand's traditional country music, is making a spectacular comeback to the detriment of Western pop as the economic malaise coupled with a gust of nationalism sparks a return to "Thai values."

Long scorned in Bangkok but popular in the countryside, Luk Thung has had its ups and downs since it originated in 1938, according to disc jockey Jenpope Jorakrauanwan.

"A feeling of nationalism has brought Thais who admired Western music back to our own music," said Jenpope, who has started a com-

pany devoted to preserving and promoting this style of music.

The daily media eulogises "Thai values," or else nationalism which sometimes smacks slightly of xenophobia, in the face of what is seen more and more as economic neo-colonialism by the West.

The shift comes as Thais, shell-shocked by the economic crisis which has shattered their economic and social dreams of the booming 1980s, fall prey to an identity crisis as they call into question the Western ideals which underpinned the "golden era."

The government has begun a major campaign of national solidarity — known as "Thai-Help-Thais" —

involving the army, major national bodies and Buddhist monks. It has also launched a "Buy Thai" campaign.

Austerity helps restore Luk Thung's popularity. "During these tough times, economic recession means that Thais have to save money, so it is better for them to buy Thai tapes and CDs instead of imported music," said Jenpope.

Luk Thung cassettes cost 60-80 baht against 70-90 (less than two dollars) for Western pop.

Luk Thung's new star is 25-year-old Arpuporn Nakhonsawan, who took the hit parade by storm last year with her sentimental hit "Lerk Laew Kah" (Split Up). She sold almost a million copies of her latest album —

her ninth — released six months ago, after the eight previous ones flopped.

Backing the revival, Luk Thung has also won itself a permanent home on the first national radio station playing the country-style music 24 hours a day.

Luk Thung FM, which started at the end of August, has become one of the most popular stations in Bangkok.

Previously this style of music was more or less boycotted by mainstream FM radio and relegated to programmed broadcast after midnight, said Arpuporn.

"When Luk Thung is broadcast on FM, people who never listened now listen and are interested in Luk Thung," said Jenpope.

"The songs speak of every-

day life and that is why they are so popular," said Arpuporn. Some make gentle criticism of the social and economic order.

"Now our Luk Thung has grown from the past, it has developed with the help of the new recording technology," she said. It has also benefited greatly from the government's "Buy Thai" campaign, she said.

But Luk Thung's fans are not limited to the newly impoverished middle and working classes. Prime among its supporters is the popular daughter of the Thai king, Princess Maha Chulabhorn Srinidhavan, who has written her own hit song entitled "Som Tam" — a favourite Thai dish.

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Agassi's path cleared as Rafter falls

Rusedski eliminated; Hingis ousts Kournikova

MELBOURNE (AFP) — Andre Agassi shot down another opponent at the Australian Open on Saturday and saw his path to renewed Grand Slam glory cleared further by the shock defeat of World No. 2 Pat Rafter.

Agassi beat Italy's Andrea Gaudenzi 6-2, 6-2, 6-0 and was installed as second favourite by bookmakers for the men's title behind old rival Pete Sampras.

His fourth round opponent will be Alberto Berasategui of Spain who beat Australian hero Rafter 6-7 (2/7), 7-6 (7/7), 6-2, 7-6 (7/4) in a dramatic night game.

"Everybody thought it would be Rafter-Agassi. But I saw my chance. I took it and ... I'm sorry," Berasategui said after.

Rafter was exhausted after nine punishing sets in two earlier matches, while



Andre Agassi of the U.S. gives the thumbs up to his coach in the stands after his third round match against Italy's Andrea Gaudenzi at the Australian Open in Melbourne January 24. Agassi won in straight sets 6-2 6-2 6-0 (Reuters photo)

Swiss star became number one.

Australia's Todd Woodbridge beat Britain's big server Rusedski, 7-6 (7/5), 6-4, 6-2.

Rusedski said he just played badly. Woodbridge said the support of the home Australian crowd had been crucial. "I think they appreciated the little guy was out there making the big ones look a bit silly at times."

Rusedski is the ninth out of 16 men's seeds to fail, with half of the tournament now completed.

Among the rest of the favourites, third seed Amanda Coetzer of South Africa eased through 6-3, 6-1 against the last Australian women's contender Annabel Ellwood.

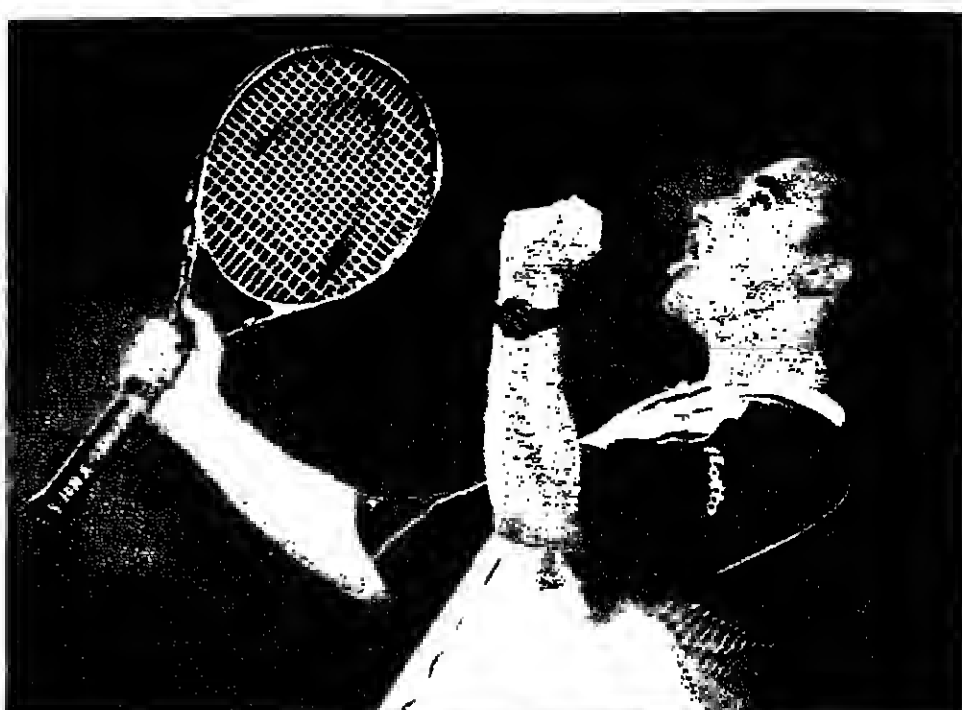
Coetzer must now play German 10th seed Anke Huber, who fought back to beat Joanne Kruger of South Africa 6-7 (4/7), 6-3, 6-2.

Fifth seed and former Open champion Mary Pierce of France beat Olga Barabanschikova, an 18-year-old from Belarus and now takes on Henrieta Nagyova of Slovakia.

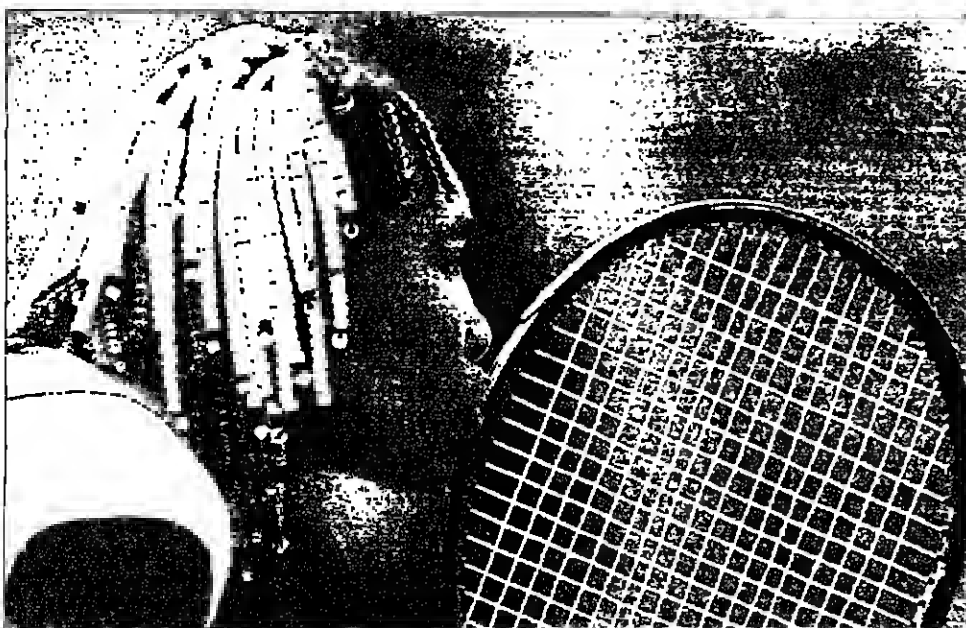
Chile's Marcelo Rios, the men's ninth seed, beat Australian qualifier Andrew Ilie to maintain his record as the only man to have reached at least the fourth round in the last five Grand Slams.



Andre Agassi of the U.S. gives the thumbs up to his coach in the stands after his third round match against Italy's Andrea Gaudenzi at the Australian Open in Melbourne January 24. Agassi won in straight sets 6-2 6-2 6-0 (Reuters photo)



Spain's Alberto Berasategui celebrates his victory over world number two Patrick Rafter after their third round match at the Australian Open in Melbourne January 24. Berasategui defeated Rafter in four sets 6-7 7-6 6-2 7-6 (Reuters photo)



Venus Williams of the USA kisses her racquet whilst partnering her sister Serena in the third round of the women's doubles at the Australian Open in Melbourne January 24. The Williams pair defeated Rika Hiraki of Japan and Mercedes Paz of Argentina 2-6 6-2 6-2 (Reuters photo)

Indonesian giantkiller Yayuk Basuki, who claimed the scalp of 14th seed Van Roost 6-4, 6-4.

Asia has three women through to the fourth round after 16th seed Ai Sugiyama of Japan beat Poland's Magdalena Grzybowska 7-6 (7/5), 1-6, 6-4 and Thailand's Tamarine Tanasugarn beat fourth seed Iva Majoli on Friday.

Basuki, ranked 24 in the world, has already beaten Hingis once, but before the



World No. 1 and defending champion Martina Hingis of Switzerland smiles during her third round match against Russia's Anna Kournikova at the Australian Open in Melbourne. Hingis defeated Kournikova in three sets 6-4 4-6 6-4 (Reuters photo)

Berasategui used whiplash topspin to prevent the Australian attacking.

There were other shocks. Australia's Todd Woodbridge ousted Britain's No. 5 seed Greg Rusedski, while women's 14th seed Dominique Van Roost of Belgium went out to Yayuk Basuki of Indonesia.

The state-run National Sportsbet now has Agassi at odds of 9-2 for the men's title, just behind Sampras at 4-6 and ahead of sixth seed Petr Korda at 10-1.

Agassi, who suffered an alarming slump last year, played against Gaudenzi with all the brilliance that made him World No. 1 in

1995 when he won the Australian Open. He served six aces, committed just one double fault and halved the number of unforced errors from the second round.

"As this tournament's gone on I've got stronger physically and I feel better now than I did earlier and my confidence is coming on now," Agassi said praising the role of his movie star wife Brooke Shields in his tennis renaissance.

"I now literally look forward to playing. I look forward to competing to try and win, the harder you push your body, the harder you push your mind, your spirit, the deep level of sat-

isfaction you have." Women's favourite Martina Hingis beat Russian teenager Anna Kournikova for the third time in three meetings — all in Grand Slams — but the 16-year-old Kournikova took a set off her for the first time in the 6-4, 4-6, 6-4 defeat.

"If I had been a little more experienced I would have been able to win today," said Kournikova, who insisted her performance was proof that she is not just a pinup girl.

Hingis was not bappy with her match. "If I want to keep winning I have to get better," she said. But Hingis now takes on

SPORTS IN BRIEF

NFL eyes games in Mexico

SAN DIEGO (AFP) — The National Football League is considering playing a regular season game in Mexico, commissioner Paul Tagliabue confirmed on Friday. There were rumors that the Tennessee Oilers, who played last year before sparse crowds in Memphis and are scheduled to play again at the Liberty Bowl next season before their Nashville stadium is ready in 1999, would play a regular-season home game in Mexico in 1998. "We are not only looking at Tennessee, but at some type of rotating regular-season game played outside of the United States," Tagliabue said. The largest crowd in NFL history, 112,376, attended a pre-season game between the Dallas Cowboys and Houston Oilers in Mexico City on August 15, 1994.

UAE to recruit foreign players

ABU DHABI (AFP) — The Football Federation of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) decided Friday to increase professionalism in football here and authorize the recruitment of foreign players by local clubs beginning next season. The UAE minister of information and culture,

Sheikh Abdallah Ibn Zayed Al Nahayan, who also heads the football federation, announced the decision in a press conference here. He said "local clubs will be able to apply professional standards, with the agreement of players" and "the clubs will also be able to recruit foreign players." UAE clubs had been forbidden to hire foreign players since 1981.

Ronaldo fined in Italy

MILAN (AFP) — Inter Milan's Ronaldo had his first brush with Italian football's disciplinary committee on Friday, when he was fined two million lira (\$1,150) for comments about referees. The Brazilian claimed that penalty decisions had been biased against Inter in their game against Sampdoria on December 6, but were biased in Juventus' favour in their match at home to Lazio on the same day. His club were also fined the same amount for the comments made by Ronaldo, who did not appear before the committee. Vittorio Cecchi Gori was meanwhile banned from exercising his duties as president of Fiorentina for 30 days and his club fined 30 million lira (\$17,000) for comments he made about referees and Italy's soccer authorities.

Kipketer sidelined by malaria

COPENHAGEN (AFP) — World 800 metres champion Wilson Kipketer has been laid low by malaria and expects to be hospitalised for at least two weeks. The Kenyan-born Dane fell ill in Faro, in the south of Portugal, last Monday, according to the Danish Athletics Federation. He will remain hospitalised for at least another 10 days, his coach Slavomir Novak said. Danish officials said they had initially kept the information secret "to assure Kipketer of the rest and calm he needed in the first days of his illness." Kipketer has been advised not to return to Denmark but to continue undergoing treatment in Portugal. "We will stay on the Algarve until Wilson is completely recovered," Novak said, adding that Kipketer was making rapid progress. World record holder Kipketer, 24, who was the 1997 IAAF Athlete of the Year, was training in Portugal in preparation for the upcoming season. He is believed to have contracted malaria on a recent trip home to his country of birth.

Nagano Olympic Village opens to mark two-week countdown

NAGANO (AFP) — The Nagano Olympic Village opened Saturday two weeks before the central Japanese city hosts the largest ever Winter Games.

"Preparations for proudly welcoming athletes and officials as our family members have been made," village mayor Shozo Sasahara told the opening ceremony as snow fell.

The 40 billion yen (\$315 million) village is located seven kilometers south of central Nagano and will be home to some 3,000 competitors and officials during the 16-day Games opening on February 7.

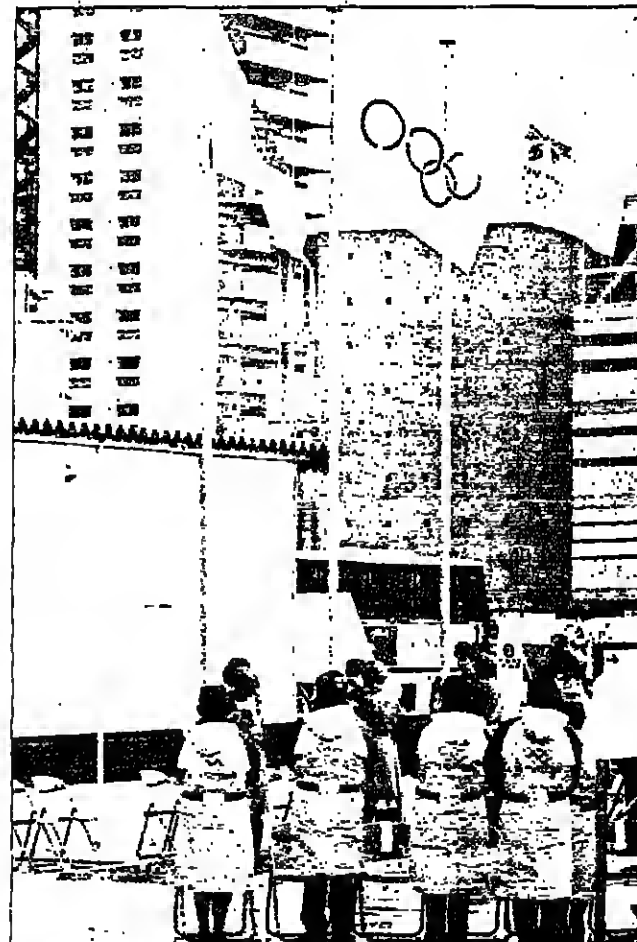
The 1,030 units in the 19-hectare complex, mostly housed in five or six-storey towers, overlook the elevated railways of a new bullet train, which started operating last October.

The Nagano Olympics will be the biggest Winter Games yet with more than 70 countries expected to participate, officials said.

During the ceremony, the flags of Japan and the International Olympic Committee were raised after Yasuko Kono, a cousin of Emperor Akihito and honorary mayor of the Olympic Village, declared the village open.

Japanese Olympic Committee (JOC) president Hironoshin Furuhashi told the opening ceremony: "I am confident that this Olympic village is one of the highest quality villages of all."

Several delegation officials from Japan, Britain and the United States checked into the village after the ceremony, officials said, with dozens of other



Officials hoist the Olympic and Japanese national flags at the opening ceremony of the Olympic Village in Nagano, central Japan January 24. The 16-day Games will open February 7 (Reuters photo)

Olympic officials and athletes from Canada, Italy, Poland and Taiwan scheduled to arrive here late Saturday.

The village is virtually a self-contained town. Public facilities include a post office, bank, hospital and curch, while arcade games, a disco and computer rooms are available for entertainment and relaxation.

At the broadcasting cen-

ter, some 4,000 people from 55 broadcasting organisations will work, including officials of U.S. network CBS, which signed a record \$375 million contract for the Winter Games.

"Some three billion people in the world will watch the Olympics," Makoto Kobayashi, director general of the Nagano Olympic Organising Committee, told the opening ceremony at the center.

TODAY AT	PHILADELPHIA "1"	PHILADELPHIA "2"	PLAZA	CONCORD	GALLERIA 2	GALLERIA 1	Hisham Yanes Theatre
	George Clooney Nicole Kidman... in THE PEACEMAKER Shows: 12:30, 2:15, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	BULLET PROOF Shows: 12:30, 2:15, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	SCREAM Shows: 8:30, 10:30 BEVERLY HILLS NINJA Shows: 12:00 2:00, 6:30	RIDING HIGH Shows: 12:15, 2:15, 6:15, 8:15, 10:30 MR. BEAN Shows: 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	ABDOUN Robin Williams... in JACK Shows: 2:00, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	ABDOUN ROMEO & JULIET Shows: 2:00, 6:30, 8:30, 10:45	NOW ON DAILY THE GOVERNMENT IN THE SERVICE OF PEOPLE Starring Hisham Yanes and Amal Dabbas For reservations call: 640155, 625155

New Jordanian record set at Perth World Swimming Championships

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Two of the Kingdom's most promising swimmers returned home this week after taking part in the World Swimming Championships in Perth, Australia. Rania Ghosheh and Hana Majaj were the only swimmers representing Jordan in the high level meet which brought together the world's top swimmers.

Although both were eliminated in the preliminary heats, both the Jordan Swimming Federation (JSF) and their parents believe that they gained much-needed international exposure and experience.

"It was a great experience for them, being one of the youngest swimmers at the event. Besides the honour of representing their country, it enabled them to learn new techniques which they can utilise to upgrade their form as they prepare for upcoming regional championships," Ghosheh's moth-

er who is also a head of the JSF's national teams committee Sunday told the Jordan Times.

Ghosheh set a new Jordanian record in the 100 metre freestyle with a time of 1 minute 05.92 seconds compared to her old record of 1.06.54.

She was the only Arab to take part in the 5 kilometre open water swim off Perth's northern beaches. Ghosheh clocked 1 hour 26.38 seconds and came in 21st in the first such participation for swimmers of The Kingdom's national teams.

The United States won the event followed by Russia and Italy. Jordan was the only Arab country taking part — a fact greatly appreciated by the International Swimming Federation FINA who have sponsored Jordan's participation.

Ghosheh also took part in the 200 metre freestyle, 100 and 200m backstroke, and 50m freestyle.

Majaj on the other hand took part in the 100m freestyle, 100m butterfly

and 200m medley.

According to JSF vice president Tala'at Al Nasser, Ghosheh 16, and teammate Majaj, 15, were sent to Perth by the JSF in a move showing "their appreciation for their efforts and achievements."

"Ghosheh and Majaj have proved to be the best in Jordan especially after their achievement in the last Pan-Arab Games which was held in Lebanon last August."

Majaj took Jordan's only swimming bronze medal in Beirut after taking third place with a time of 2:32m in the 200m butterfly. Ghosheh took fifth place with 1:14m in the 100 backstroke, only one second apart from the fourth and third places.

Both swimmers hope that experience gained at such an international event will help them prepare for the next Pan-Arab Games which will be held in Amman 1999.

Scuffles, injuries mar season-ending Jordan Cup final

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The season-ending Jordan Cup final turned nasty following Al Wihdat's 2-1 win Friday night with at least two members of Al Ramtha Club admitted to hospital for injuries sustained following the match. Ramtha Club officials said Saturday.

Club Spokesman Salu Zoubi, said that player Laith Dardour and the team's paramedic Mohammad Zoubi were injured when some of Al Wihdat fans allegedly started throwing stones at the bus which was carrying the team following the match.

Mr. Zoubi said that the two were admitted to University Hospital, and Mr. Dardour was seriously injured and lost consciousness following the attack.

He added that police arrived at the scene but failed to protect the players.

"We do not know why this happened. We lost the game and they won. We do not know why this attack took place," said Mr. Zoubi.

He said the police arrested several people for their role in the attack.

The official accused the referees for the scuffle that erupted between the two teams players during the second half.

"The referees were not able to control the match and failed to contain the tension that erupted following the scuffle," added Mr. Zoubi.

A spokesman of Al Wihdat club denied that the attack was carried out by their fans and accused a third party of being responsible for what happened.

"We denounce this attack and we do not like to see such things happen in our country because it harms everyone," said Khader Sowwan, a spokesman for Al Wihdat Club.

"We believe that this attack was carried by infiltrators who have nothing to do with our fans and we can assure our brothers in Al Ramtha that our fans were not responsible for what happened," Mr. Sowwan told the Jordan Times.

He said that many of his club's fans were detained following the match by the police "but some of them were released while others remain in custody."

Mr. Sowwan said that he and the Al Wihdat Chairman Bahjat Shihab have visited the injured at hospital on Saturday.

During the second half, Al Ramtha and Al Wihdat players exchanged punches which led to a five-minute halt of the final match, which Al Wihdat won to add to the Premier League and Cup Winners' Cup title of 1997.

The two teams administrators entered the football field and tried to calm down the players.

Mr. Zoubi said that if such mistakes by referees are not addressed "the club will reconsider its participation in all local sport events in the Kingdom."

He added that a meeting of the club's board of directors will be held to discuss the attack against the players and take a decision on what action to take.

Mr. Dardour, who was discharged from the Intensive Care Unit on Saturday, said that his team was leaving the stadium when they were attacked by fans who also entered the bus and threatened the players.

He said that this is not the first time his club was subjected to such attacks following matches against Al Wihdat.

Some of Al Wihdat fans told the Jordan Times that the police behaviour was provocative to fans and many were beaten by the police following and during the match.

"The police were harassing our fans and started beating us when we tried to leave the stadium," said a fan who asked not to be identified.

Another fan claimed that some of Al Faisali fans — who are Al Wihdat's main rivals — attended the match and provoked their rival's fans during the match.

Some of Al Ramtha fans also allegedly attempted to attack Al Wihdat's bus but were prevented by the police.

Bulls manage to beat Nets in OT

EAST RUTHERFORD, New Jersey (AP) — A controversial goaltending call with a half-second left in overtime gave Chicago a 100-98 victory over New Jersey on Friday night in a game Dennis Rodman missed after his first brush with trouble this season.

Rodman was sent back to Chicago by coach Phil Jackson after missing the team shoot around Friday morning. The Bulls obviously missed him as they were out rebounded 54-34 and allowed the Nets to stay in the game by scoring several key baskets after grabbing offensive rebounds.

In the end, though, it came down to an alley-oop inbound pass from mid-court that was grabbed by Jason Caffey as Nets rookie Keith Van Horn scrambled late onto the court after a time-out. As Caffey was ready to dunk the ball, Jayson Williams came over and attempted to block the shot.

Referee Tommy Nunez called goaltending and the Nets, with only four players on the court due to Van Horn's tardiness, were out of luck.

Michael Jordan scored 32 points for Chicago, which won its fourth straight and seventh in eight games.

Indiana Pacers 106, Utah Jazz 102: At Indianapolis, Rik Smits scored 25 points, including two free throws with 24 seconds left that put Indiana ahead to stay, and the Pacers overcame a 15-point deficit in the second half to defeat Utah.

Reggie Miller scored 22 points and Antonio Davis had a season-high 21 as the Pacers defeated the Jazz for the first time since March 19, 1994, span of eight games.

Karl Malone led Utah with 26 points, while John Stockton had 18 points and 11 assists.

Philadelphia 76ers 98, Portland Trail Blazers 87: At Philadelphia, Derrick Coleman scored 14 of his 22 points in the fourth quarter as the Philadelphia 76ers snapped Portland's four-game winning streak.

Allen Iverson also had 22 points for the 76ers, who won their fifth straight home game for the first time since the 1992-93 season. The 76ers are 7-3 overall in their last 10.

Boston Celtics 89, Atlanta Hawks 85: At Atlanta, Antoine Walker's basket off a jump ball with 31.7 seconds remaining broke a tie and the Boston Celtics, after squandering a 22-point lead in the second half, defeated the Atlanta



Chicago Bulls guard Michael Jordan (23) reacts after he dunks the ball past New Jersey Nets forward Jayson Williams (55) during action in the first half of their NBA game at the Meadowlands Arena (Reuters photo)

Hawks.

Miami Heat 102, Orlando Magic 90: At Miami, Tim Hardaway scored 27 points as Miami handed injury-plagued Orlando its sixth straight loss, the Magic's longest losing streak in six years.

Forward Horace Grant became Orlando's latest casualty when he dislocated his right ring finger in the second quarter.

Miami's Jamal Mashburn scored 25 points, including 15-for-15 from the foul line. Isaac Austin added 21 points and 10 rebounds for the Heat, who shot 53 per cent from the field.

Phoenix Suns 93, Denver Nuggets 77: At Phoenix, the Denver

Nuggets tied an National Basketball Association record for most consecutive losses in one season, dropping their 23rd game in a row.

The Nuggets matched the single-season, losing streak record set by Vancouver during the Grizzlies' inaugural season in 1995-96.

Denver, 2-38 overall and 0-22 on the road, is closing in on the all-time record set by the Cleveland Cavaliers, who lost 24 straight games over two seasons in 1982.

San Antonio Spurs 81, Dallas Mavericks 75: At San Antonio, David Robinson had 17 points and 13 rebounds as San Antonio won for the 19th time in 22

games.

Vancouver Grizzlies 88, Golden State Warriors 80: At Oakland, California, Shareef Abdul-Rahim scored 26 points, all in the first three quarters, and Vancouver pulled away down the stretch to hand Golden State its 13th consecutive loss.

The Warriors are four losses away from tying the longest losing streak in franchise history.

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Ghedina goes into history books

KITZBUHEL, Austria (AFP) — Kristian Ghedina put himself in the history books here on Saturday when he became the first Italian to win a World Cup downhill on the famed Kitzbuehel piste.

Ghedina clocked 2mins 05.49secs to finish ahead of Switzerland's Didier Cuche (2:05.63) and Austria's Joseph Strolz (2:05.85).

"To win here is a dream come true," beamed Ghedina.

"I had two aims this season. The first was to win at Kitzbuehel. The second to win an Olympic medal. I am halfway there," added the Italian, who apart from winning the first downhill of the season at Beaver Creek has had a disappointing season.

Cuche, who won the two-leg downhill sprint here on Friday for his first World Cup success, was equally delighted.

"I did not sleep last night after winning on Friday. All I wanted to do today was finish in the top ten. Second is a real bonus," he said.

Race officials were forced to halt the race after the 42nd skier had completed the piste.



Denver Broncos quarterback John Elway stretches at the start of team practice at the San Diego Chargers training facility in San Diego, January 23. The Broncos will face the defending champion Green Bay Packers in Super Bowl XXXII January 25 (Reuters photo)

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U.N. inspector believes Iraq hiding arms plant

WASHINGTON (R) — A senior U.N. official said on Friday he had "tantalising information" that Iraq may be operating a secret biological weapons plant despite U.N. inspections and in defiance of an international ban.

Asked whether he believed Baghdad had a working plant it was keeping secret from UNSCOM (U.N. Special Commission) experts, Richard Spertzel, head of the Commission's biological weapons team, said: "this is very likely."

Mr. Spertzel, attending a seminar on UNSCOM's work at the Washington Institute, declined to give any further details, including what agents he believed the plant was making or whether U.N. inspectors had sought to visit it.

"We have good, tantalising information but no concrete information... that we can take to the Security Council. If we did, I think it would end the debate on ending the sanctions [on Iraq] immediately."

Mr. Spertzel was speaking on the day UNSCOM Chairman Richard Butler told the Security Council that Iraq appeared determined to give no new information to the inspectors in any field. UNSCOM inspectors are looking into missiles programmes and chemical and biological weapons.

Iraq is pressing for an end

to the inspections and all U.N. sanctions imposed after the 1991 Gulf war. Mr. Spertzel said Iraq had the means to revive its biological weapons programmes almost immediately should inspections end. "All they need is the opportunity to do it," he said.

In 1991 Baghdad denied it had any germ warfare programme, but was forced to provide details after an Iraqi defector disclosed information on the programme in 1995. Iraq has admitted that it had facilities to mass-manufacture anthrax, aflatoxin and botulinum and had loaded them into more than 150 bombs and missiles.

Although UNSCOM concedes there has been progress in tracking down and destroying other sectors of President Saddam Hussein's programmes to build weapons of mass destruction, they say they have been constantly stymied over biological weapons.

A so-called "full, final and complete disclosure" of its biological programs given to UNSCOM in September was dismissed by the U.N. body as "not remotely credible."

Mr. Spertzel said of the Iraqi document that "in virtually every paragraph it has errors of fact, errors of omission or errors of commission that is what makes the biological story so difficult to assess."

Mr. Spertzel, a veteran of U.S. biological weapons defence programmes who has been working with UNSCOM since 1994, said he would be going back to Baghdad on Thursday for meetings on missile warheads.

He said Iraq was seeking to close the files by April in all three weapons areas handled by UNSCOM — nuclear programmes are being inspected by the international atomic energy agency in Vienna, another U.N. agency.

"They are seeking a political solution, not a technical solution," he said.

In the Security Council, Russia, France and China are indicating a willingness to be flexible while Britain and the United States remain adamant that Baghdad cooperate fully with the weapons inspections before sanctions can be lifted.

Expressing the inspector's frustrations, Mr. Spertzel said: "Presently, all the experts feel like we are standing alone."

Mr. Spertzel said the biological weapons programme had been the area the Iraqis had been most reluctant to disclose and noted that — because much of the equipment needed for such weapons has other possible pharmaceutical uses — it is very hard to track.



KUKERS FOR GOOD HEALTH & HARVEST: Spectators look at people dressed in animal costumes dancing during an annual folk festival in the town of Pernik, some 40 kms south of Sofia Saturday. Dancers, named 'kukers', call for good health and harvests in the coming year (Reuters photo)

Norwegian officials leave for Algeria on fact-finding mission

OSLO (AFP) — Two senior Norwegian diplomats left Saturday for a two-day visit to Algeria aimed at gathering information on the eruption of violence in the country and creating a dialogue with Algerian officials, the foreign ministry said.

Odd Wibe, the former ambassador to Syria and foreign ministry advisor for the Middle East, and Kjell Oestrem, Norway's ambassador to Tunisia also responsible for Algeria, are expected to return to Norway on Monday evening.

"I am an envoy sent by Foreign Minister Knut Vollebeck. I will get information, show Norway's concern, and try to create a dialogue," Mr. Wibe told the Norwegian news agency NTB.

The pair will not have a security escort during their stay, which follows a European Union (EU) troika visit earlier this week.

According to Mr. Wibe, meetings with the Algerian foreign ministry and health ministry as well as several foreign embassies and U.N. representatives are scheduled in what is viewed as a Norwegian diplomatic effort.

Algerian authorities gave the green light for the delegation late Monday, though it set "some restrictions," the foreign ministry said, adding that Algeria has refused all proposals concerning humanitarian assistance.

EU disinclined to take further action following disappointing Algiers visit

BRUSSELS (AFP) — The European Union is disinclined to take further action to try to end the civil war in Algeria following the disappointing visit to Algiers by the so-called EU troika.

Deputy foreign ministers from Luxembourg, Britain and Austria, the previous, present and next presidents of the EU, were thwarted in their objectives by the Algerian authorities during their 18-hour visit last Monday and Tuesday.

They had wanted to express EU solidarity with the Algerian people, tens of thousands of whom have been massacred in the conflict between the military-backed government and Islamists.

They also intended to discuss with the government how to help it to combat the violence, and try to persuade it to accept the visit of a United Nations rapporteur for human rights.

But they were not allowed to visit the scene of recent massacres or even lay a symbolic bunch of flowers in memory of those killed, while the authorities continued to reject any U.N. intervention in what they insist is

an internal matter.

The only message the troika received from Algiers was: "If you want to help us, smash the Islamic support networks which operate in some of your countries, notably Britain."

A British source here indicated however that the EU had no intention of restricting any dialogue with the Algerians to the single demand. "We are prepared to listen to the Algerian proposals on terrorism but in a wider framework," the source said.

Faced with this deadlock, EU foreign ministers meeting here Monday are consequently expected merely to take note of the troika's report on its mission. The Algerians did not even show any particular desire to make progress towards an agreement on economic links with the EU which would facilitate exports to Europe.

However, the British source said the foreign ministers would try to stress the positive aspect of the troika's visit, namely that it took place at all.

"Following the mission there is a mixed feeling of encouragement and disappointment within the EU,"

the source said.

London is now looking forward to playing host to Algerian Foreign Minister Ahmad Attaf, at a date which has yet to be fixed.

Early next month a delegation from the European parliament plans to go to Algiers, but has not yet been given the green light, though Mr. Attaf agreed to it in principle in November.

European public opinion is also beginning to stir over Algeria, though it is still confused in the face of the rigid stance taken by Algiers and the inertia of Western leaders.

Human rights bodies say it is too simplistic to accept the Algerian government line that the sole responsibility for the massacres lies with the Armed Islamic Group (GIA).

In an interview published Saturday in the French left-leaning daily Liberation, German Deputy Foreign Minister Werner Hoyer said Algiers had much to gain by adopting a policy of transparency.

"A great deal of doubt and mistrust could be dissipated if Algeria agreed to open up," he said, urging that a U.N. representative be invited.

Sex scandal Clinton's punishment for knocking Israel — Arab press

NICOSIA (AFP) — The growing sex scandal embroiling U.S. President Bill Clinton is a punishment from the "Zionist lobby" for his administration's increasing criticism of the Israeli government, Arab newspapers claimed Saturday.

"The fact that this scandal broke at the same time as Palestinian President Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu were visiting Washington was premeditated... to stop President Clinton putting the pressure on Mr. Netanyahu which the Arabs had been bopping for," charged the Saudi newspaper Al Jazira.

"The failure of the talks between Clinton and Netanyahu... proves that those who are behind this scandal achieved their objective," the paper alleged.

U.S. investigators have alleged that President Clinton had an affair with a former White House aide, Monica Lewinsky, then pressured her to deny the affair in court, which would constitute obstruction of justice.

Mr. Clinton has vehemently denied both the affair and that he committed perjury for denying the relationship under oath when he testified last weekend in a sexual harassment lawsuit.

The allegations erupted Wednesday, a day after Mr. Clinton met Mr. Netanyahu and a day before he met President Arafat.

Another Saudi newspaper suggested the timing of the scandal was deliberately organised to ensure that the Israeli prime minister received lots of publicity in the United States for his views while the Palestinian leader got virtually none.

"You have to ask whether pro-Israeli circles chose this moment to put pressure on the U.S. administration," said Al Riyadh.

"Has Clinton become the hostage of the Israeli supporters who surround him and, behind them, of a network of financial groups and secret services who are grasping the opportunity to change president?" the newspaper asked.

Al Itihad, an official daily published in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), was equally adamant that President Clinton was "the victim of a campaign of retribution aimed at seeking his impeachment after the attitude he showed to Netanyahu in recent months."

"The Zionists were probably surprised when President Clinton condemned Netanyahu's policy of [expanding Jewish] settlements [in the occupied

territories]," the newspaper said.

"They were certainly angry when the president did not invite the prime minister to dinner or to hold a joint press conference as is the custom — it is why they reacted so swiftly," it claimed.

Another UAE newspaper, Al Khaleej, charged that both Ms. Lewinsky "and her lawyer are Jewish" and claimed that Mr. Netanyahu had said before his departure to Washington that he would "see off the administration by using the Congress, the media and the friends of Israel" in the U.S.

The Syrian official daily Al Thawra predicted "further scandals or a worsening of the Monica affair if Clinton persists in his unhappiness with Israel."

Iraq's official press warned that President Clinton might be tempted to order a military strike against Iraq to distract attention from his domestic difficulties.

"To distract attention from his sexual scandals, it is possible that President Clinton may commit a new military folly against Iraq," said Babel newspaper.

The UAE daily Al Khaleej made the same suggestion Friday.

Mideast church leaders look for way to stop dwindling numbers

NICOSIA (AP) — In a pastoral letter to their estimated 14 million followers, the heads and representatives of more than 30 Middle Eastern churches lamented Saturday the region's dwindling number of Christians and spoke of the need to raise their profile.

The letter, issued after a one-day meeting of the Middle East Council of Churches, said Christians and Muslims must begin a dialogue to create a society in which all are treated equally.

"Today, Christians face many problems which keep them from effective participation in public life, something which in turn gives rise to feelings of fear and anxiety," the letter said.

"But despite these problems, which test the presence of Christians and their

faith, we urge our sons... to deal with the present situation in a spirit of objectivity and wisdom and free from exaggeration and scare-mongering," it said.

The dialogue, it said, would aim at a society "based on respect for multi-ethnicity and total equality among its citizens."

The letter pointedly avoided discussing specific problems facing Middle Eastern Christians, some of whom complain they lack civil and human rights. Muslim scholars, too, have long debated the role and place of non-Muslims in Muslim societies.

High on the list of Christian concerns in the overwhelmingly Muslim Arab world is the rapid decline in Christians' numbers and what many believe to be their political margin-

alisation.

"The number of Christians is dwindling everywhere in the Arab World," said Tarek Mitri, a Lebanese who deals with inter-religious relations at the Geneva-based World Council of Churches.

"Everyone has been whispering about the decline in the number, but now it is being openly discussed," he said.

Hundreds of thousands of Arab Christians have left the region for North America, Australia and Western Europe, mostly to seek a better life, but also to escape a Muslim revival which threatens to revive dormant Muslim tenets such as a special tax on non-Muslims.

The rate of their departure has picked up pace in recent years with the rise in several Arab states of Islamist groups.

Algeria denies ex-PM's massacre claims

LONDON (R) — Algeria on Friday denied charges by former Algerian Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Brahimi that security forces were behind a wave of massacres that have claimed more than 1,200 lives since the end of last year.

"These accusations which emanate from a former Algerian official are groundless and idle talk," Algerian Television said in a broadcast monitored by the British Broadcasting Corporation. "Undoubtedly, they reveal a sense of spite against Algeria and of a deep political despair."

Mr. Brahimi, who was prime minister of Algeria from 1984-88, told British members of parliament on Thursday the government was responsible for the massacres it has pinned on Islamist rebels such as the Armed Islamic Group (GIA).

Chirac urges Asia to keep markets open

BOMBAY (AFP) — French President Jacques Chirac urged Asian leaders here Saturday to continue economic reforms and not to be panicked into protectionism following the recent turmoil in financial markets.

Mr. Chirac told business leaders at the start of a three-day state trip that he had full confidence the region would bounce back.

"The Southeast Asian crisis should not throw into doubt the necessary opening up of economies," he told the seminar of around 400 businessmen. "We have all gained from the opening up of our countries' economies. It has been the key to the Asian success."

He said Asia was facing "a crisis of adaptation" but argued that the conditions for economic success — "work, savings and investment" — would pull the region's economies out of the crisis.

President Chirac's trip will focus mainly on France's economic ties with India.

Mr. Chirac, who said his delegation included "the biggest names in industry and finance," added that France "was suffering from a lack of profile" in India.

He said the two countries should aim to create "a more ambitious and expansive economic relationship."

Mr. Chirac also said he hoped India's domestic and international airlines would soon buy aircraft from the French-led European consortium Airbus Industrie.

The French president told Indian and French business leaders in Bombay: "In the field of transportation, I hope that the interest of your airlines for Airbus would soon lead to an agreement."

"France is at your disposal for accompanying your development as our technologies can meet the requirements of your country," Mr. Chirac said.

The European manufacturer has said it was determined to sell more than 100 aircraft to India in the next 15 years.

He is being accompanied by a business delegation, as well as French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine, Technology Minister Claude Allegre and Economy Minister Dominique Strauss-Kahn.

The political value of the visit was devalued by the fall of India's coalition government late last year. India goes to the polls in February and March.

The president Saturday kept the emphasis on trade, saying his visit was a vote of confidence in India. "I have confidence in India, in its reforms, in its will to open up and in our partnership."

Mr. Chirac said France wanted to take part in the development of India, a country which was "ready to become one of the economic powers of the 21st century."

The fall of the coalition government in November left two other presidents, Bill Clinton of the U.S. and Boris Yeltsin of Russia, to cancel trips early this year.

France has around 150 companies active in India but officials from both sides say there is huge room for improvement.

France is the eighth largest investor in India and its 18th largest exporter. It stands 13th in the list of importers of Indian products.

President Chirac is due to attend the Republic Day parade in New Delhi on Monday as guest of honour. Both nations are keen to mend fences following an 18-month freeze which started in 1995.

They fell out after Pakistan, India's arch-rival with whom it has fought three wars in the past 50 years, announced it was set to buy French Mirage fighter jets.

U.K. motor racing hero Mansell banned from driving

LONDON (R) — British motor racing hero Nigel Mansell was banned from driving for six months this week after being caught speeding on public roads for a third time. Police tracked Mansell cruising at over 145 kph in his turbo-charged Bentley last December. The top speed limit in Britain is 110 kph. Mansell's lawyer said he apologised for breaking the law. The car "is well insulated against noise and... it creeps over 110 kph without him realising it," she said.

Woody Allen doesn't believe in lawyers or courts

NEW YORK (AP) — In jacket and baseball cap, prospective juror Woody Allen told a judge he doesn't believe in lawyers, the courts or the legal system. The American director, who was called for jury duty in civil court, reportedly told Judge Paul Bookson: "The courts do not serve justice." The director lost a bitter and very public child-custody battle with actress Mia Farrow in 1993 and recently married her adopted daughter, Soon-Yi Previn.

Spice Girls hire cooks for bug-less world tour

LONDON (AFP) — Britain's top female singing group, the Spice Girls, are planning to hire a legion of cooks for their upcoming world tour to reduce health hazards, the Daily Star reported. Three of the five Spice Girls have suffered from food bugs in recent months, forcing the group to cancel a concert in Canada and an appearance on Canadian Television. In future, the girls say they will not eat any more foreign food and will stick to grilled meat. They will each have their personal cook, for a total budget of \$400,000.

Liz Taylor and Rod Steiger reportedly romantically involved

LOS ANGELES (AFP) — Off-marted Elizabeth Taylor and Oscar-winning veteran actor Rod Steiger are romantically involved, according to syndicated U.S. gossip columnist Liz Smith. Taylor, 66 next month, and Steiger, 72, who won an Oscar for his role in "In the Heat of the Night," are "more than just good friends," Smith said in a report which appeared in several U.S. newspapers.

Boy 12, is Britain's youngest father

BEDFORD (AFP) — A schoolboy just turned 12, became Britain's youngest dad when his girlfriend aged 16 gave birth to a boy. Sean Stewart was given leave from his school to attend the birth of Ben Louis at Bedford Hospital in eastern England. Sean was only 11 and his friend Emma 15 when she became pregnant last summer. However, Sean will not go into the Guinness Book of Records which only counts the youngest mothers.

Thracian treasures on U.S. tour

SOFIA (AFP) — More than 500 treasures from the ancient kingdom of Thrace are embarking on a tour of the U.S., the Bulgarian culture ministry said. The gold, silver and ceramic artefacts date from the 13th to 4th centuries BC. It will be the biggest exhibition of Thracian treasures outside the country. The 20-month tour starting on Feb. 9 takes in seven U.S. museums, in Saint Louis, Fort Worth, San Francisco, New Orleans, Memphis, Boston and Detroit. Thrace was the name given to a region of southeast Europe now occupied by parts of modern-day Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey.